The Portsmouth Papers

Published by Portsmouth City Council
Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth PO1 2AL

No. 13 September 1971
Reprinted 1979
Price 50p

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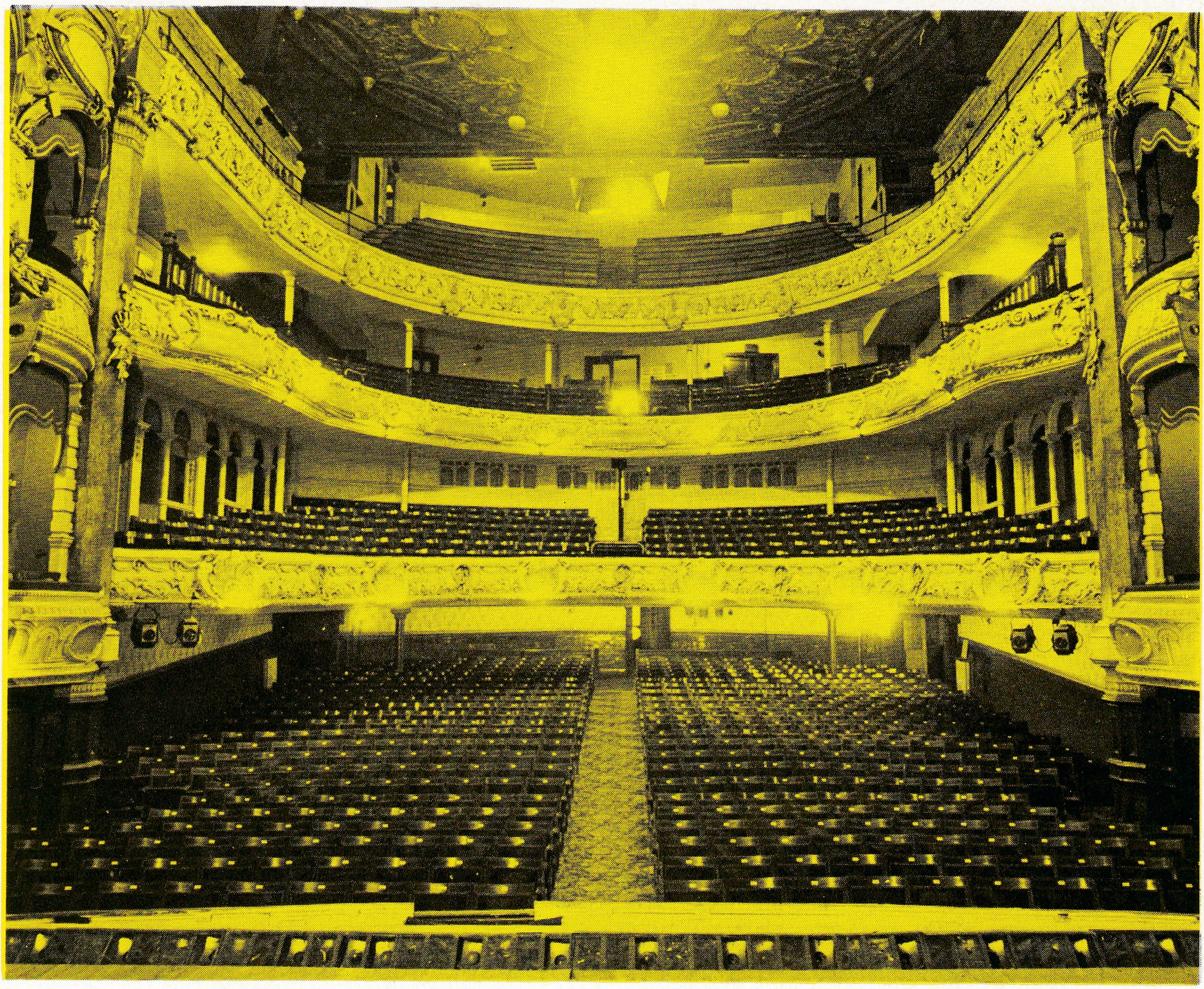
A History of Portsmouth Theatres



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Portsmouth City Council, Civic Offices,
Guildhall Square, Portsmouth, PO1 2AL

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ISBN 0 901559 15 6

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Cover illustration: The Theatre Royal, which, apart from a break of 16 years as a cinema, served the theatre lovers of Portsmouth for 103 years.

By courtesy of *The News,* Portsmouth

Printed by Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited at
Grosvenor Press, Portsmouth

A HISTORY OF PORTSMOUTH THEATRES

H. Sargeant, FLA

The history of the Portsmouth theatres, despite many gaps and discrepancies, is extremely fascinating and moreover gives interesting sidelights on the social conditions in the town, particularly in the late eighteenth century. The story could undoubtedly be made much more comprehensive but it would need several years of widespread research, partly because many likely sources of information are in other towns. This may at first seem curious, but the explanation lies in the methods of providing theatrical fare in those days. There were three main types of companies operating, the first being centred on the principal town in a limited area, but at the same time building up a touring circuit to play the main towns in that area. The second group consisted of minor strolling players who visited the smaller towns, but who occasionally played in a larger theatre if the resident company was on tour. The players who, from time to time, left London for the provinces formed the third group, but their visits tended to decline as those in the first group became more firmly established. The strange thing about the circuit touring companies was that, owing to the apparently limited use they made of the local press wherever they were playing, the best coverage was often found in the local newspaper published in the base town. A good example of this can be found in the old files of the *Salisbury Journal* which published a local edition for circulation in Portsmouth.

The earliest suggestion of a theatre is to be found in a report of one of the borough's constables, Henry Wight to the Mayor, Thomas Brouncker, dated 26th May 1694 in the City Record Office[1] collection. It appears that a wanted sailor was being chased through the streets when he was thought to have disappeared into the Queen's Head where, in a large room, a play was in progress. This is no reason for assuming it was a theatre, but considering the association which often existed between inns and theatres in those days it could have been used by a company of strolling players.

The siting of eighteenth-century theatres in Portsmouth is still open to question and a brief *résumé* of the information available may help to avoid confusion later in this paper. The local histories all more or less agree but give no evidence to support their conclusions. The sequence generally accepted was St. Mary's (later Highbury) Street opposite Crown Street, High Street four doors above the Unitarian Chapel (this was No. 130), and finally where the Grammar School now stands. A recent architectural thesis gives the first site as Crown Street but again without supporting evidence. J. G. Olle, a former member of the Portsmouth Reference Library Staff, did some research on the subject and seems to be the only person who found any evidence of the move across the street, dating about 1790. If this is correct the theatre built by John Arthur in 1761 would have been the one near the Chapel, but it is now known that there was one in use in High Street in 1750, which seems to indicate that there may have been three different sites or, alternatively, that the 1750 site was the one near the Chapel and the one built by Arthur was the one sold to the War Office in 1854. Arnold Hare in his *Georgian Theatre in Wessex* seems to bear out the latter possibility when he writes, 'Inelegant though its exterior was, this building spanned almost a century of theatrical history. The theatre that Arthur built, and Maddocks [an obvious mistake for Mattocks] and Collins upheld, was the same building, later to be immortalised by Charles Dickens as the theatre of Mr. Vincent Crummles.' The earliest date given in local histories can be discounted, and indeed W. G. Gates, writing in 1938, was obviously ready to accept Peter Davey's view that there was probably an earlier date. This proved to be correct, for W. J. Macqueen-Pope, having mentioned visits by strolling players, went on to say 'but our first star was no less a personage than Charles Macklin, who was here in 1732'. This is confirmed in Gilliland's *Dramatic Mirror* and Winston's *Theatric Tourist*, the latter revealing that while at Portsmouth as a member of an itinerant company his wife was giving birth to a daughter, when he received an advantageous offer from the Drury Lane manager. This he accepted and so took a step towards what was to become a long and distinguished theatrical career. The earlier note of a theatre being used in 1750 referred to a company of comedians from the Theatre Royal, London, under the management of a Mr. Lee. The company apparently gave general satisfaction, as a note from someone in Gosport to the *Salisbury Journal* shows: 'The said comedians are very much esteemed, and, in short, deserving, for they are the best I ever saw in these parts, as well as for their genteel behaviour in private life, as for their Publick Capacity as actors on the stage.' They certainly had a distinguished following, for on the 25th June they played *Henry IV Part I* and *Tom Thumb* for the entertainment of His Excellency Hadge Mahamed Hajee, the Algerine Ambassador, and on the 13th August presented *The Double*

[1] Ref. no. S3B/112.

Gallant and *The Diversions of the Morning* before the Prince of Anamaboe. This was a benefit performance for Mr. Lee, but unfortunately nobody seems to have identified which one it was. There were two quite well-known Lees at that time, one being a leading member of the Richmond Hill and Twickenham Summer companies and the other having close associations with the Bath Company. The fact that the first one only played in London once that summer suggests that it might have been he, but on the other hand the Bath players regularly moved into Hampshire and Wiltshire in the summer. The prevalent habit of billing actors as 'Mr.' without any initial very often proves misleading and certainly makes identification more difficult. Three years later in May performances of *The Committee* and *Harlequin, Dr. Faustus* were given in Portsmouth and again it is a matter for speculation as to whether the company came from Bath or elsewhere. The Plymouth and Bath companies were always struggling for influence in Portsmouth, a plum date, but in this case it was probably the latter as they were on a summer tour which included Southampton to the end of July and Salisbury during August and September.

Information on the Portsmouth Theatre during the middle years of the eighteenth century is very scarce, but from time to time, thanks to actors' reminiscences, one or two years got a good coverage. Notable among these were Edward Cope Everard, John Bernard, John O'Keefe and Tate Wilkinson, the last two including interesting sidelights on the town and some of its personalities. They also revealed a considerable amount of information on the great importance of the local gentry and officers of the garrison to the managers and players. Their strong patronage was all the more remarkable, for neither the theatres nor the audiences suggested a high social atmosphere in those early days. The extent of their influence is clearly shown in Wilkinson's *Memoirs* when he describes a dinner party in London; and because of what it revealed, what it led to, and its particular interest to Portsmouth people it is worth recounting in some detail. In May 1758, Major Strode, the Garrison Commander, and his wife were staying in London with a family named Townsend and at the same time a Mrs. Arnold and her daughters, also from Portsmouth, were visiting London. The Townsends and the Hanways, to whom the Arnolds were distantly related, were great friends of Tate Wilkinson and his mother and were always scheming to help Tate in his career as an actor. Knowing her visitors' great interest in the theatre Mrs. Townsend decided to give a dinner party and invited the Arnolds, Mrs. Wilkinson and her son, the Strodes and Jonas Hanway. In the course of the ensuing conversations Mrs. Wilkinson paid great tribute to her son's devotion to her and these sentiments were echoed by Jonas Hanway. Mrs. Strode suddenly broke the short silence which had followed the eulogies by saying 'Good God! Mr. Hanway, a thought strikes me as swift as lightning, whereby we can with pleasure and ease to ourselves be of infinite service to Tate'. She went on to point out that as it was a time of war between England and France, Portsmouth was full of soldiers and sailors with plenty of money in their pockets. She told the party that every summer a Mr. Kennedy brought his Plymouth and Exeter company of players to Portsmouth and that on her return home she would send for him and arrange for Tate's engagement for the summer season. She and the Arnolds proceeded to do this as soon as the company arrived in the town, and in due course Mrs. Strode wrote to Jonas Hanway telling him of their success and summoning Wilkinson to come immediately to Portsmouth. The members of the company, which incidentally was known as the 'Brandy Company' on account of its intemperate habits, were very jealous of interlopers, who might encourage actors to come out of London and steal their leading parts. The London actors were apparently very partial to Portsmouth, 'being only seventy-two miles from the great city' and a place where they could be 'refreshed with delightful sea breezes'. In view of this it is not surprising to learn from Wilkinson's *Memoirs* that the manager 'was commanded, not entreated, under peril of their Authority and the severe law in force, to comply with Mrs. Strode's mandate'. His terms were to have a share (no distinction being made between one character and another), and to have a clear benefit at such time as he chose, and to play as often as called on by the manager from the 9th June to the 14th August. His benefit night on the 24th July, when he played Cadwaller in *The Provoked Husband*, was a great success and was graced by the presence of His Royal Highness the Duke of York. During the season he played in thirteen dramas and four farces, making over forty appearances in all. In the following year he returned to Portsmouth, but a number of the previous year's company, who were dissatisfied at the leading rôles he had taken over, went elsewhere. Wilkinson's influence, however, enabled him to get satisfactory substitutes and so remove any difficulties Kennedy might have experienced, and his own ability to draw audiences more than compensated his manager. The new company included Miss Morison,

This probably shows the Theatre as it was for about 30 years after Arthur built it. Between 1791 and 1805 Collins made considerable additions which could well have resulted in the building shown in the 1831 sketch.

By courtesy Portsmouth City Libraries.

Kitty White (late Mrs. Burden), Mrs. Daly, Mrs. Osborne, Mrs. Blake, Mr. Burden, Mr. Moody and Mr. White. Mrs. Osborne created something of a record by giving birth to a baby during the fifth act of *The Mourning Bride*. She and Moody had just returned from Jamaica and for the latter it was to be a rewarding season, for Garrick visited the theatre, saw him play and promptly engaged him for Drury Lane. Wilkinson relates that a large fleet was lying at Spithead and the town being full of sailors the theatre was crowded every night, so much so that the audience were so close to the players that it was almost impossible for them to proceed. One night when he was playing Hamlet with Moody as the grave-digger, the manager nudged him and whispered, 'Take care; Mr. Garrick is in the pit'. This caused consternation amongst the actors, each imagining himself being specially criticised by the London manager. The piece was nearly over and Wilkinson, having tried in vain to discover the great actor in the pit, went home to supper and bed believing the whole thing to have been a joke, but next morning a waiter from the Fountain Tavern brought a message; 'Mr. Garrick's compliments, would Mr. Wilkinson come and breakfast with him?' The invitation was accepted, his old manager giving him a hearty welcome. After breakfast they walked about the town, Garrick leaning on Wilkinson's arm. During this season he had two clear benefits, the first being on the 9th July with all seats at full price, the second on Wednesday the 29th August, and so the season came to an end having proved, to use his own words, 'greatly to my advantage'.

In the following year, 1760, he went back to Portsmouth prepared to play in the next season only to find that jealousies and strained relationships, which had caused trouble in the previous year, were even more pronounced and he was faced with new demands by the company. The two clear benefits of the 1759 season were to be replaced by one and the Sharing System was to operate. He refused to accept these terms, left for Winchester, and secured an engagement with the Bath Company for a summer tour. It is interesting to note that the terms he refused were soon to disappear as it was during this period that the end of the Sharing System was in sight, and before long managers were to gain absolute power. The payment of salaries was to be introduced and any influence on engagements passed from the players to managerial control.

Financial problems at the end of the 1760 season and a strong desire by the local gentry and officers for a better theatre and standard of acting encouraged

Mr. Arthur of the Bath Company to contemplate building a new theatre in the High Street. In the meantime after his summer tour ended Wilkinson followed his usual practice of returning to London for the winter but was back again in Portsmouth in the spring of 1761 (not 1760 as he states in his *Memoirs*). Mrs. Strode encouraged him to put on a few nights of entertainment for the garrison and at his request secured the use of the theatre. He arrived with his friends Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Austin, only to find the theatre in something of a shambles. Kennedy had returned to Plymouth taking with him all the scenery, wings and such items as Desdemona's bed and Juliet's balcony and tomb. Undeterred, Wilkinson and his companions set to work and soon had the theatre shipshape and ready for their impromptu entertainments, although apparently no plays were performed. In due course he returned to London, but not before he had discussed the new theatre with Mr. Arthur and had agreed to appear for the coming summer season, which was due to open in time for the annual Free Mart Fair in July. This would probably not have presented any problem if Kennedy had not removed so much material, but as it turned out Arthur had set himself an almost impossible task and the scene which greeted Wilkinson when he arrived for the opening day on the 20th July 1761 was one of complete chaos. There are several vivid descriptions of the day's proceedings and although they are too long to quote in full a summary is worth inclusion, if only to show the irrepressible spirit that existed in those days, when every misfortune became a challenge. The stage was waist deep in shavings, nor was there a single seat in the pit and at twelve o'clock the company pronounced it impossible to play, but by seven o'clock Arthur had achieved some semblance of order. The crowd who had been waiting in the street for three hours eager to gain admission had become quite unruly when suddenly the manager appeared before them, arrayed not like his advertised Polonius but, according to Wilkinson, 'more resembling one of the witches in *Macbeth*; for he had on an old round flapped hat, a woman's checked apron, with a large broom in his hand, and his face begrimed and greasy as a barn-acting Othello in the Dog-days'. He harangued the crowd, asking them to be patient while he and the carpenters swept the house clean of shavings and sawdust, but soon afterwards the doors were burst open and all the seats seized by anxious playgoers who had paid nothing. Even this failed to daunt him and when the noise had died down he doffed his hat and went carefully round the theatre to collect what he could, nor would he allow the performance to begin until he was satisfied that not another shilling could be obtained. The curtain rose at nine o'clock and amid a cloud of dust the unrehearsed players somehow managed to get through. In a few days Wilkinson was able to report, 'our little theatre was really an elegant, well-approved, and fashionable place of resort: far different from what the families of Portsmouth had ever then experienced in point of grandeur, comfort, or regularity: or as a respectable company of comedians'.

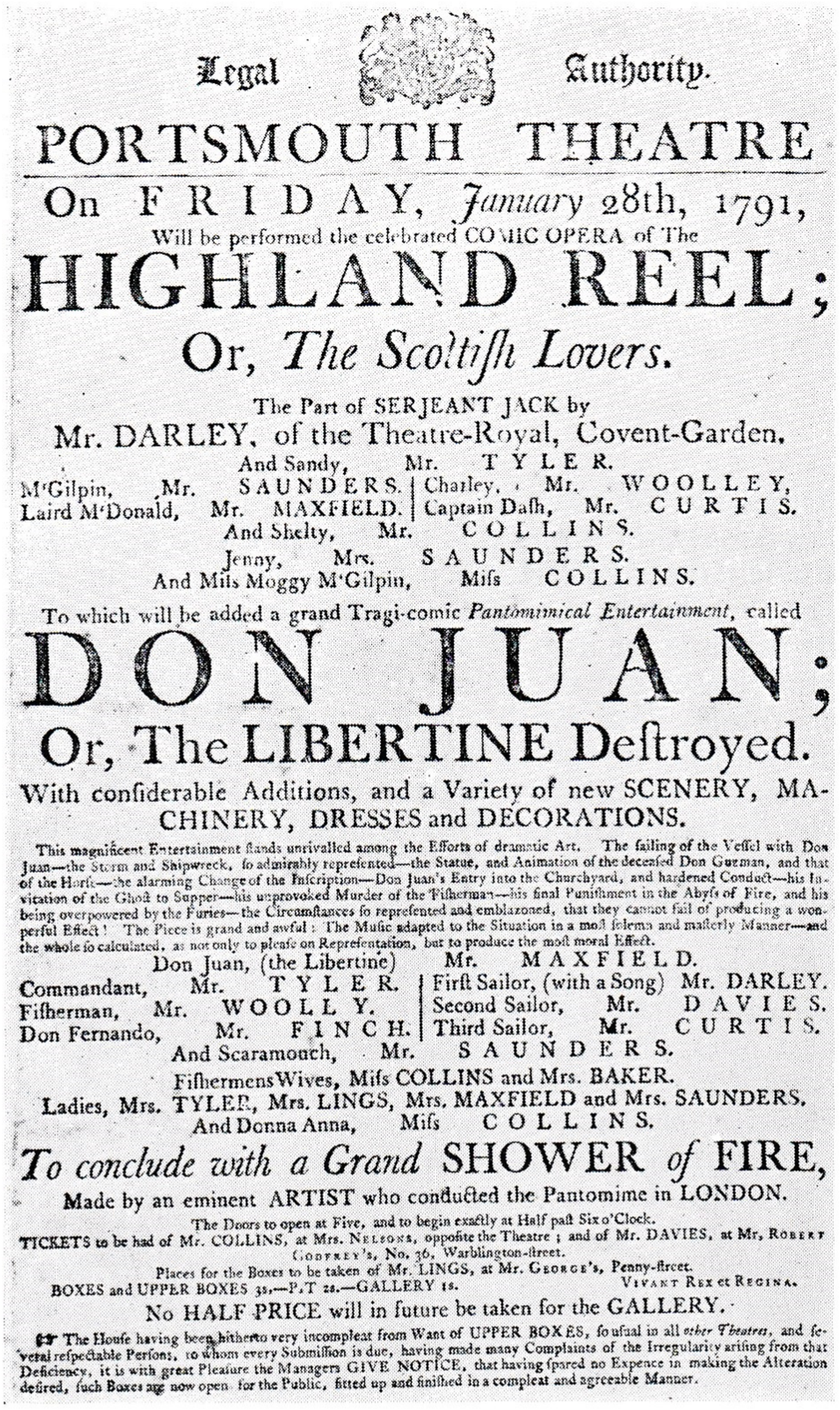
The first season in the new theatre lasted until the 19th October, finishing with a strong cast in *Henry VIII*; Wilkinson as Wolsey, Keasberry as Cranmer, Stephens as Henry, Miss Reynolds as Anne Boleyn, Mrs. Blake as Queen Katherine, and Arthur himself as Gardiner. *Tamerlaine* and *The Upholsterer* were performed on Monday, 26th September, Wilkinson's benefit night, which he described as being 'greatly attended and the best in our whole successful season'. The Plymouth Company had in the meantime set up in the old theatre but so bad was their reputation and so poor their equipment that they can have offered little effective opposition to the 'quality company'. The Bath players had apparently been in Portsmouth in the summer of 1762 but had returned to their winter quarters. Wilkinson, having heard that with the end of the war with France ships of war were sailing into Portsmouth daily to be paid off and money was plentiful, decided to pay a few days' visit to the 'Brandy Company' at the old theatre. It was a successful trip and on his benefit night, the 20th October 1762, he played *Lear* to a packed house. Before returning to London he took the opportunity of once again viewing his beloved ramparts of which he never tired, but it was to be twenty years before he saw them again.

In 1763 one Samuel Johnson set about building up a circuit for Hampshire, Wiltshire and West Sussex, but it was Tuesday, 24th March 1767 that his company was first recorded as appearing in Portsmouth. There it was presenting *The Earl of Warwick* to a brilliant and crowded audience' – 'all the characters were dressed in the old English taste'. The company again visited Portsmouth in May 1769 and by this time Johnson had Collins in partnership. There appears to have been an informer in the area and for the first time appears what Arnold Hare calls 'one of the polite fictions under which the eighteenth century players cloaked the official illegality of their performances'. This can best be explained by the following quotation from the *Salisbury Journal*. 'We hear that Messrs. Johnson and Collins have taken the new

histrionic Academy in Portsmouth, in which they will deliver serious and comic lectures by subscription. This evening for the first time, *The Jealous Wife* and *Wit's Last Stake*. The academy is properly aired and cleaned. The lectures begin at precisely 6 o'clock'. Gilliland and Winston both record Johnson as letting the theatre to Mattocks, with Wheeler joining them as deputy in 1776. Gilliland also adds the name of Simpson and the fact that Johnson only held it for a year. Mattocks therefore probably took over in 1770 and this arrangement continued until, according to the *Hampshire Chronicle*, Collins and Davies purchased the unexpired term of the lease from Redman Simpson's excutors.

Mattocks, a talented actor-vocalist from Covent Garden, so inspired a Portsmouth boy, John Bernard, by his acting and eccentricities that he decided to make the stage his career and ultimately became an outstanding actor-manager. In his *Retrospections of the Stage* he gives a good pen picture of Mattocks when he writes that once a fortnight he was permitted 'to take a peep at the Temple of Thespis erected in my native town, and opened for the summer by the handsome Mr. Mattocks, with one or two fourth-rates of the royal houses, and a qualifying mixture of provincial experimentalists. He was to my infant fancy the beau ideal of a hero and a gentleman. I remember him sailing down the principal street in a morning to rehearsal, arrayed in a gold-laced suit of green and white, with a bag-wig, three-cornered cocked-hat, a silver-mounted cane and a silver-handled hanger'. The early years of the 1770's have little recorded information, although Peter Davey does refer to a company going on to Rochester after winter seasons in Portsmouth during 1771 and 1772. Arnold Hare mentions this and then goes on to 1778, but by a process of elimination it would appear that O'Keefe in his *Recollections* is describing a summer season in 1773. He writes 'This was the summer of the naval review by his Majesty, and consequently the whole Court, and corps of fashionables and unfashionables, had left town and thronged to Portsmouth'. There were two naval reviews in the 1770's, one in the fourth week of June 1773 and the other in the first week of May 1778, and as it is known that the summer season in 1778 did not begin until mid-June it follows that the review O'Keefe refers to is that of 1773. It was the review which indirectly led to a slight contretemps between Mr. and Mrs. Mattocks. The curtain was due to go up on the opera *Maid of the Mill*, but Mrs. Mattocks, seeing the house only half full, regarded it as a slight on her and refused to go on, telling her husband to 'dismiss the house'. He knew the dangers of doing this but pretended to agree and she left the stage. He then let the curtain go up and she, hearing the orchestra, came back furious, but by the time the first scene was over the house was full; she relented and according to O'Keefe 'performed the charming Patty with all her usual delightful and delighting powers'. What had happened was, that being a very fine evening the populace waited to see His Majesty, who had been on the water, before they went into the theatre. While still at Portsmouth O'Keefe adapted his *Tony Lumpkin's Rambles* 'to the localities, customs and circumstances of the royal excursion; and free from any self advantage, had it performed for the benefits of Wheeler, Booth, Mattocks, and Mrs. Kennedy, who were of the company, and it was received with high relish and applause. The box audience were all the courtiers; . . . Lord Chatham had his place in the side-box: there was a box fitted up for the King'. The company really seem to have entered into the spirit of the review and to add local colour to a performance of Smollett's *Reprisal: or The Tars of Old England* the prompter, without the knowledge of Mattocks, decided to engage a number of real men-of-warsmen to take part in a boarding scene. Unfortunately the enthusiasm of the sailors carried them away and they forgot they were supposed to be acting. Scenes were cut up by their hangers, slashed and demolished, and Dutton, who was playing the French Captain, nearly lost his life, only the intervention of the prompter and Mattocks, who had suddenly grasped the situation, saving him.

In the 1778 season, which ran from mid-June to the end of September, several of the 1773 players reappeared and there were also many additional names, and a fairly big company seems to have provided a very full and mixed repertoire. Two benefits provided examples of the steps taken to make certain of good houses. Mrs. Hudson's was boosted by 'grand transparencies illuminated with upwards of five hundred lights', and Booth for his brought Mrs. Farrel from Covent Garden to play Macheath in *The Beggar's Opera*. O'Keefe states that Booth came to Portsmouth 'to play a very good cast of parts; but, poor fellow! to his great vexation, he caught a hoarseness, lost his voice, and did not speak a word on the stage through the whole season'. This has not been traced elsewhere, but, strange though it may seem, it may be true, for often in those days audiences would be so noisy and unruly that the performance would rest almost entirely on the acting, the players' words being completely lost. In 1781 the first theatre in



Legal Authority.

PORTSMOUTH THEATRE

On FRIDAY, *January* 28th, 1791,

Will be performed the celebrated COMIC OPERA of The

HIGHLAND REEL;

Or, *The Scottish Lovers.*

The Part of SERJEANT JACK by

Mr. DARLEY, of the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden.

And Sandy, Mr. TYLER.

M'Gilpin, Mr. SAUNDERS. | Charley, Mr. WOOLLEY,
Laird M'Donald, Mr. MAXFIELD. | Captain Dash, Mr. CURTIS.

And Shelty, Mr. COLLINS.

Jenny, Mrs. SAUNDERS.

And Miss Moggy M'Gilpin, Miss COLLINS.

To which will be added a grand Tragi-comic *Pantomimical Entertainment*, called

DON JUAN;

Or, The LIBERTINE Destroyed.

With considerable Additions, and a Variety of new SCENERY, MACHINERY, DRESSES and DECORATIONS.

This magnificent Entertainment stands unrivalled among the Efforts of dramatic Art. The sailing of the Vessel with Don Juan—the Storm and Shipwreck, so admirably represented—the Statue, and Animation of the deceased Don Guzman, and that of the Hearse—the alarming Change of the Inscription—Don Juan's Entry into the Churchyard, and hardened Conduct—his Invitation of the Ghost to Supper—his unprovoked Murder of the Fisherman—his final Punishment in the Abyss of Fire, and his being overpowered by the Furies—the Circumstances so represented and emblazoned, that they cannot fail of producing a wonderful Effect! The Piece is grand and awful: The Music adapted to the Situation in a most solemn and masterly Manner—and the whole so calculated, as not only to please on Representation, but to produce the most moral Effect.

Don Juan, (the Libertine) Mr. MAXFIELD.

Commandant, Mr. TYLER. | First Sailor, (with a Song) Mr. DARLEY.
Fisherman, Mr. WOOLLY. | Second Sailor, Mr. DAVIES.
Don Fernando, Mr. FINCH. | Third Sailor, Mr. CURTIS.

And Scaramouch, Mr. SAUNDERS.

Fishermens Wives, Miss COLLINS and Mrs. BAKER.

Ladies, Mrs. TYLER, Mrs. LINGS, Mrs. MAXFIELD and Mrs. SAUNDERS.

And Donna Anna, Miss COLLINS.

To conclude with a Grand SHOWER *of* FIRE,

Made by an eminent ARTIST who conducted the Pantomime in LONDON.

The Doors to open at Five, and to begin exactly at Half past Six o'Clock.

TICKETS to be had of Mr. COLLINS, at Mrs. NELSONS, opposite the Theatre; and of Mr. DAVIES, at Mr. ROBERT GODFREY'S, No. 36, Warblington-street.

Places for the Boxes to be taken of Mr. LINGS, at Mr. GEORGE'S, Penny-street.

BOXES and UPPER BOXES 3s.—PIT 2s.—GALLERY 1s. VIVANT REX et REGINA.

No HALF PRICE will in future be taken for the GALLERY.

☞ The House having been hitherto very incompleat from Want of UPPER BOXES, so usual in all *other Theatres*, and several respectable Persons, to whom every Submission is due, having made many Complaints of the Irregularity arising from that Deficiency, it is with great Pleasure the Managers GIVE NOTICE, that having spared no Expence in making the Alteration desired, such Boxes are now open for the Public, fitted up and finished in a compleat and agreeable Manner.

A typical playbill during the period of the Collins-Davies management.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

Landport came into the picture when Luke Kent assisted by James Perry, who had left Wheeler's company at the old theatre, opened the Sadlers Wells Theatre next to the 'White Swan Inn'. His intention was to offer an effective opposition to the High Street Theatre and the resultant competition led to a flood of papers, letters, paragraphs and caricatures published by the partisans of each establishment. It was eventually offered for sale in 1783, presumably through lack of support, although many believed it was due to the reluctance of the actors to play because they were alarmed by the regular appearance in the corps de ballet of one person in excess of the number in the company. It appears to be during this period that one of the most quoted stories of the Portsmouth Theatre occurred. Stephen Kemble, the manager, was approached by a sailor who was due to sail to India on the morrow and expressed his desire to see a play before he left the country as he thought he might not get the chance again. The theatre was closed that night but after listening to his pleading Kemble agreed to put on a play for a fee of five guineas. The man chose the play, *Richard III*, and the manager played the name part. Having followed the action of the play with a copy the sailor expressed himself completely satisfied, thanked the manager, and so ended what must have been unique in the annals of theatre history. If the story is true it would have been in 1783 when neither of the Mattocks seem to have been in the company but there was a Kemble and a Miss Kemble. This was a summer season under Wheeler and was possibly run alternately with a little theatre in Middle Street, Gosport. The company contained none of the names of those who had appeared in earlier seasons and was probably drawn partially from Drury Lane, a policy which was being adopted for the summer seasons.

Two years later Portsmouth was to see the first symptoms of Mr. Brereton's insanity when according to the *Dramatic Mirror* 'in the part of Lovel in *The Clandestine Marriage* he obliged his wife, the present Mrs. Kemble, who personated Fanny, to dance a Minuet, which is totally irrelevant to the character'. In *Alexander the Great*, at the point where the lady cried, 'Hold off and let me rush into his arms', instead of letting her suit the action to the words, he stalked off leaving her to finish the scene as best she could, and when playing Posthumus in *Cymbeline* he came dancing on the stage and frivolously altered all his speeches.

In 1787, Collins took over the management and this led to considerable developments. He opened with a winter season which ran on until the early part of the following year. He seems to have concentrated on Portsmouth, Southampton, Winchester and Chichester, with a very occasional visit to the Isle of Wight. The sequence was usually a winter and early spring season in Portsmouth, then on to Chichester; Winchester was always visited in July and part of August and finally Southampton before returning again to Portsmouth. Sometimes the company would leave their seasonal headquarters to play one or two nights in other towns, taking their leading performers with them. The change from a summer season to the winter for Portsmouth may have been governed by the fact that in those days Southampton was a more popular holiday centre. Collins also ran a theatre at Gosport, not the one Wheeler started, but one near the King's Arms, though it is not known whether he built it. He certainly did a fair amount of building, but Portsmouth had to be content with periodic improvements, which is rather strange as it was, according to Winston, the most profitable of the four towns. The doubt about the siting of the High Street theatre has been referred to earlier, but whether Collins was involved in a move across the street or

not has no material effect on the history of the theatre under his control. It was round this time that the playbills began to be headed 'Portsmouth and Portsea Theatre' and it has been argued that this indicated a new theatre. This could be true but is not necessarily so, because Collins, being such a good business-man, might have believed it to be a more commanding title than 'Portsmouth Theatre' or 'New Theatre' which was not infrequently used over the years, sometimes without even any reference to Portsmouth. Whatever the truth is about the various sites it can safely be assumed that the improvements Collins began to make in 1791 were all in the theatre which stood on part of the site of the present Grammar School. This was the beginning of more than twenty years of good and generally successful management. Collins had built up his tight little circuit partly because it was less costly than a larger one, with all its problems of distance. Winston actually states that the years of his partnership with Davies made the fortunes of both men. Portsmouth, despite successes in the other towns and problems of its own, remained the sheet-anchor of the circuit. In those early years the noisy audiences often overstepped the mark, causing real trouble, and Portsmouth seems to have had more than its fair share just before the end of the century. In 1791 the disorders were so bad that the theatre was closed by the magistrates for five weeks and more trouble in 1795 led to a further closing, to the disappointment of the public, and in consequence the management and players suffered much hardship. The play, ironically enough, was *Everyone has his Faults*. There had been more disturbances two years earlier but in this case the culprits were imprisoned and sent for trial at the sessions, though the theatre was not penalised. Ten years later the last serious incident took place while a new comedy by Holcroft was being performed. A party of young naval officers objected to the play and repeatedly interrupted the players, so that the constables were sent for but as the offenders were armed and drunk they were loath to act. Then a military patrol arrived and took some of the rioters into custody, but some escaped by calling out 'fire'. This started a panic and some of the ladies climbed over the boxes, trying to get to the stage, and despite the efforts of a number of gentlemen several were injured by the spikes (used to keep the public from clambering on to the stage) and others fainted. Six officers were in due course tried by the Recorder at the sessions, and in fining them £165, no mean sum in those days, he advised them never to draw their swords again except in defence of their country.

These accounts may give the impression that there was a regular background of rowdiness, but this was by no means true, and indeed Dibdin's account of his visit to the Portsmouth Theatre suggests the reverse. It throws such a light on the management of Collins, backed by the Act of 1788, which made playing legal, that it merits quotation in full. He wrote in his *Observations on a Tour through Scotland and England*, 'I must not take leave of Portsmouth without doing justice on a subject which I had mistaken, as well as others. I own I always dreaded to occupy the theatre there, for I had conceived that, in a sea-port, where it cannot be but that vice and infamy must be found, a playhouse would of course exhibit every sort of riot and quarrelling. I never was so much mistaken in my life. An assembly room, regulated by a master of ceremonies, could not be better conducted. It is true prostitutes were seen there in plenty, but there was a great space set apart for them, where they were obliged to conform to the rules and orders, or be turned out. They did not dare to bar up the lobbies and insult modest women. Better discipline never was observed. They were permitted to be happy as long as their conduct was inoffensive, and so good an effect had this wholesome established regulation on their conduct, that, if I may judge by what I myself witnessed, there is more bare-faced profligate indecency practised at Drury Lane or Covent Garden Theatres in an evening, than at Portsmouth Theatre in a season.' The Act referred to was the result of a growing discontent by the public and country managers at the threat of legal action. Collins and Davies had been fined £100 at Salisbury after someone had informed against them. There was also the unfairness of the system whereby privileged centres could apply for the Royal Patent and so put themselves on the right side of the law. The process was costly and only a limited number were able to take advantage of it. Norwich and Bath led the way in 1768 and a few others followed, but it was ten years later before even Bristol obtained it. The granting of the Patent was the origin of the provincial Theatres Royal. The Act was sponsored in the House of Lords by the Earl of Radnor, an admirer of Collins, and by Mr. Hussey in the Commons. It allowed licences to be issued for the performance of plays, hitherto presented in the patent theatres, for up to sixty days at a time. There were certain reservations, but generally speaking it was a good Act, giving a much increased status to managers and players alike.

Thornton, at one time a prompter with Wheeler in Portsmouth and in 1791 running his own company

An unpublished study of Edmund Kean as Richard III, made behind the scenes at the Theatre Royal, High Street.

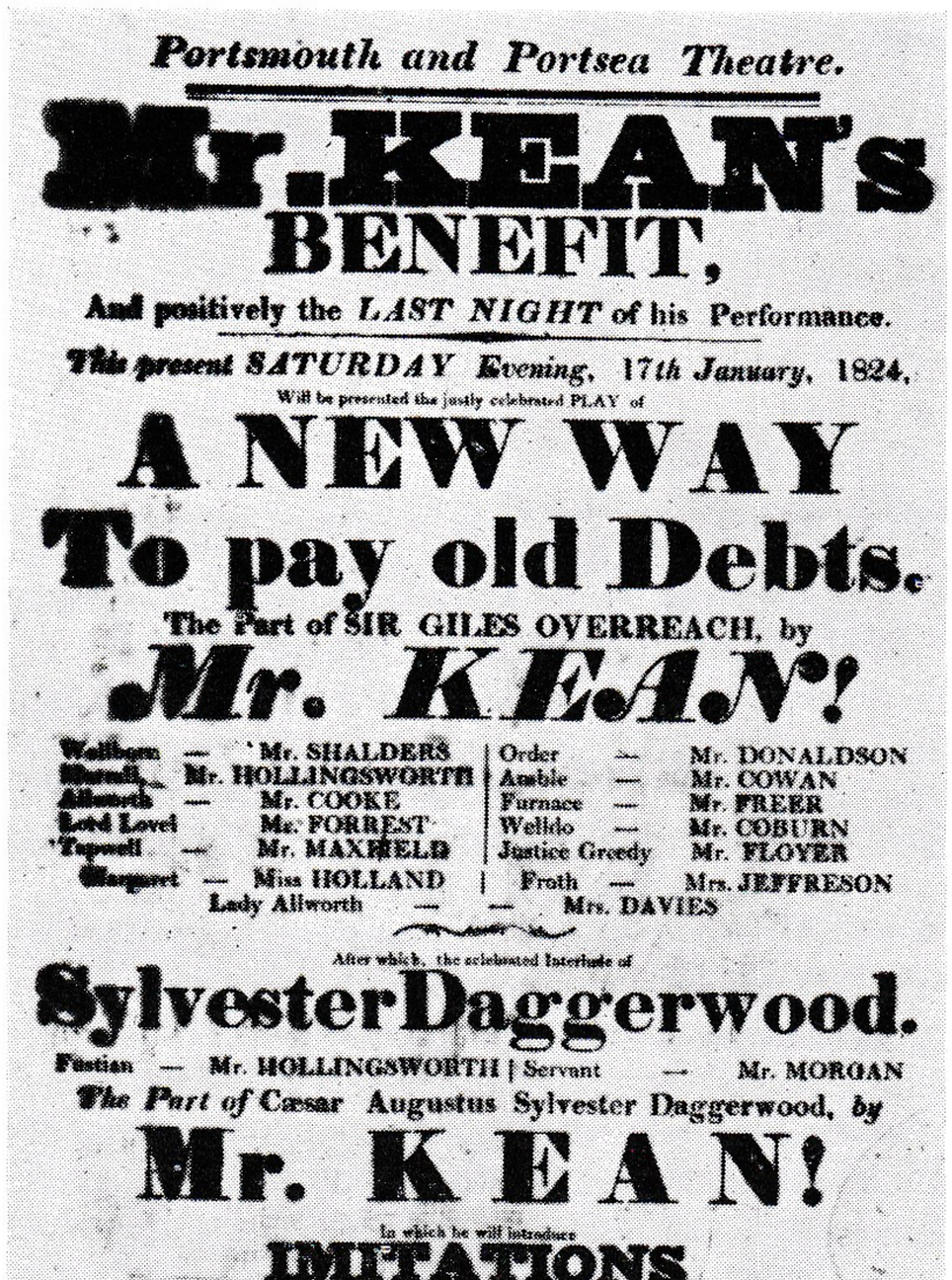
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Museums.

in Gosport, opened yet another theatre in the town early in November 1796. Collins, although probably in too strong a position to worry about local competition, was taking no chances and opened in Portsmouth at the end of the month. Business was good for both companies, but as Collins stepped up the challenge Thornton gradually disappeared from the scene. Shatford, who for some years had been running a company based on Salisbury, but on a wider circuit than that of Collins, ventured into the area, playing at Winchester in 1806. There must, however, have been a good relationship between the two managers as Shatford was using the theatre owned by Collins. This appears to be borne out by a letter to the *Hampshire Chronicle* sent by Maxfield from the Portsmouth Theatre in which it is clear that there were a number of personal friendships between members of the two companies. The following year Collins was at Southampton with his company, but as it transpired it was to be his last engagement, for at the beginning of December he died and so ended forty years of devoted service to the theatres of Wessex. There is no doubt that through the influence of Collins Portsmouth played quite an important part in the general history of the theatre during that period and was indeed regarded as a good training ground for actors, not a few of the Drury Lane stars having made their first appearance in the town. It was for some years a very profitable date and Collins was obviously very shrewd when he broke away from Salisbury in favour of Portsmouth. The move having been so successful financially, it is rather difficult to understand why, despite the amount he must have spent on rebuilding in other towns, Portsmouth, his oldest theatre, had to be content with improvements every few years. In 1791 he added a tier of upper boxes, in 1800 there were further improvements, and in 1805, after adding another tier of boxes, it was redecorated. In 1803 lighting still consisted of wax candles and oil lamps, although gas was just beginning to be used. There had been criticisms by the public of poor lighting and limited stage equipment and it may be because of this that the addition of five large cut-glass chandeliers in 1806 was heralded by a certain amount of managerial flourish. The lack of adequate lighting and scenic backgrounds placed a greater responsibility on the acting and it is not surprising to find that even actors who admired Collins sometimes commented unfavourably on these deficiencies. The most likely explanation of his failure to rebuild in Portsmouth was that he considered the improvements he had made were adequate for a theatre that was making money.

It was during this same period that the management began to show more consideration for its patrons by letting the humbler ones take up their seats an hour, or even an hour and a half, before 'curtain up', thus saving them the unpleasantness of queuing up in all kinds of weather. The high regard in which the public held the Collins-Davies partnership must have been shared by their players for, although some of them moved after a year or so, at least twelve remained with the company for over ten years. The Portsmouth Reference Library has playbills advertising benefit nights for many of them and what reports are available leave little doubt about their satisfying results. The families of the two managers made quite a substantial contribution to the fortunes of the company, Mr. and Mrs. Davies gaining considerable publicity by using several of their eight children in performances. Three of their daughters were in a production at Portsmouth in January 1788, and a fourth, Henrietta, married

one of Collins' sons, Thomas, the other being Stephen, the box-keeper. The only daughter married Henry Kelly and later their son and daughter carried on the family tradition. The younger Collins continued with the company until he was snapped up by Sheridan for Drury Lane but he did not entirely desert them, coming as a visiting star during the summer seasons, though Henrietta did not return, probably because of ill-health which marred both their lives. In 1797 they lost their baby girl before she was twelve months old. Davies then died, thus ending the long partnership, and the elder Collins developed a serious complaint which was to cause him considerable suffering during the remaining ten years of his life. Further misfortune struck the family when in March 1806 Henrietta died, and her husband's brilliant career was cut short by his death in his father's Portsmouth house only two months later. James Shatford died just two years after the elder Collins and so in twelve years the Wessex theatre scene lost three of its greatest managers. Collins had taken complete control of the circuit after the death of Davies and was not only manager but also proprietor of the theatres in which his company played. The shock of the deaths of his son and daughter-in-law, however, coupled with his own illness, compelled him to leave the day-to-day running of the company in the hands of Maxfield and Kelly, who on his death became joint managers.

The new managers had control for about twenty years with varying success, but the end of the war with France brought the departure of the troops and a long period of distress for Portsmouth. This, combined with the decline of patronage and the neglect of conditions in the building, made the position very insecure. London actors were engaged from time to time in an effort to retain the support of the gentry, and while they drew good houses there must have been many poor ones in between their visits. Edmund Kean was probably the most outstanding actor to play in the High Street Theatre, but how often he appeared has not yet been established. He certainly performed there for three nights each in March 1818 and June 1819 and five nights in January 1824, taking his benefit on the Saturday night when he played one of his greatest parts, Sir Giles Overreach, in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. In addition he appeared in the name part of *Sylvester Daggerwood* and gave imitations of actors, harlequins and singers, including Kemble, Munden, Cooke, Incledon, Bannister and Braham. The performance concluded with the farce *Fortune's Frolic*, but Kean took no part in this. There had been some changes in the resident company, but although Miss



Portsmouth and Portsea Theatre.

MR. KEAN'S BENEFIT,

And positively the LAST NIGHT of his Performance.

This present SATURDAY Evening, 17th January, 1824,

Will be presented the justly celebrated PLAY of

A NEW WAY To pay old Debts.

The Part of SIR GILES OVERREACH, by

Mr. KEAN!

Wellborn — Mr. SHALDERS
Mr. HOLLINGSWORTH
Allworth — Mr. COOKE
Lord Lovel — Mr. FORREST
Tapwell — Mr. MAXFIELD
Margaret — Miss HOLLAND
Lady Allworth — — Mrs. DAVIES
Order — Mr. DONALDSON
Amble — Mr. COWAN
Furnace — Mr. FREER
Welldo — Mr. COBURN
Justice Greedy Mr. FLOYER
Froth — Mrs. JEFFRESON

After which, the celebrated Interlude of

SylvesterDaggerwood.

Fustian — Mr. HOLLINGSWORTH | Servant — Mr. MORGAN

The Part of Cæsar Augustus Sylvester Daggerwood, by

Mr. KEAN!

In which he will introduce

IMITATIONS OF MANY EMINENT ACTORS, HARLEQUINS, and SINGERS,

PARTICULARLY

Mr. Kemble Mr. Cooke
Mr. Munden Mr. Bannister
Mr. Incledon Mr. Braham

And SING several of the most popular AIRS of the two last Gentlemen.

He will also shew the manner in which it is supposed Mr. INCLEDON and Mr. BRAHAM would perform

RICHARD and RICHMOND,

In the Tragedy of King Richard III.

To conclude with the truly laughable Farce, called

Fortune's Frolic.

Robin Roughhead, Mr. FLOYER | Old Snacks, Mr. HOLLINGSWORTH
Rattle, Mr. FREER | Countryman, Mr. DONALDSON | Mr. Frank, Mr. FORREST
Dolly, — — — — Mrs. DAVIES
Miss Nancy, Mrs. SHALDERS | Margery, Mrs. JEFFRESON

Doors opened at Six o'Clock, to begin precisely at Seven.—Tickets and Places to be taken of Mr. Cosgrave, No. 27, Lombard-Street.

MOTTLEY & HARRISON, PRINTERS.

Kean also played on four other nights, the plays being Richard III, Othello, The Merchant of Venice and King Lear.

By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

A hitherto unpublished sketch of the Theatre Royal, High Street, as it appeared in 1831.
By courtesy of the City Record Office.

Kelly had gone to the Haymarket Theatre her father was still appearing regularly, as was Maxfield, their best actor, and their popular and versatile comedian, Billy Floyer, who must have created a record for benefits which were always under the patronage of high-ranking officers. Miss Davenport, the juvenile actress, appeared for the first time, as did the Shalders family, who were later to be associated with the new theatre in Landport. Unfortunately, the theatre failed to match up with the players engaged, and by 1829 had fallen into such a state of disrepair that when the re-opening was announced in December the *Hampshire Telegraph* expressed surprise. It understood that the interior had only been whitewashed, although it had the assurance of the management that it would not be decent to ask audiences to visit it or to seek the support of the gentry of the town and neighbourhood unless the interior was remodelled and repaired. The press in its summing-up said, 'It will be advisable for all ladies who intend to witness the performance of Madame Vestris to be cautious, lest they injure their dresses, to be well wrapped up in furs, and to take the precaution of having a servant to hold an umbrella over them'. What happened is not revealed, but these comments appeared on 7th December, Madame Vestris was due to appear on the 14th for five nights, and on the 21st the press commented 'The Managers have done much to remedy that of which we complained'. If the original comments were justified there must have been some feverish activity in the pre-opening week!

In the following year the theatre was bought by Thomas Ellis Owen, who according to Saunders built the saloon, but did not otherwise improve the building for dramatic purposes; though in the City Record Office there is a record of his being granted permission to erect a new portico to the box lobby entrance. This in itself may not be very important, but an architect's sketch which accompanies the application to the Portsmouth Improvement Commissioners to make an encroachment into the High Street is, for it shows the whole frontage and reveals several features not included in the illustration so frequently reproduced in books and periodicals.[1] This illustration must have been of an earlier date, the architect's sketch probably showing the theatre as it remained until the time of its demolition. Owen let the theatre to a Mr. Hollingsworth but he was unable to obtain a licence and it reverted to Maxfield, who managed it until 1836 when it was closed for lack of support and unseemly behaviour. It reopened briefly in March 1837 for the engagement of 'the most celebrated Juvenile Actress of the Day, Miss Davenport', and, remote though it may seem, this isolated booking was to lead to the beginnings of one of the greatest theatrical families the English stage has ever seen. George Terry, the son of a Portsmouth innkeeper, was a member of the orchestra and kept his brother Ben informed of all that was taking place. The latter had for years been attracted to the stage and some years earlier had watched the great Kean. George was the only member of the family to take Ben's addiction seriously and used his influence to get him into the orchestra, and so gave him a chance ultimately to meet Shalders from whom he learnt much about stage work. Ben enthusiastically related all his experiences to his sweetheart, Sarah Ballard, daughter of a local builder. She was not averse from sharing his love for acting, but because of her parents' objection to him they were forced to marry secretly. The ceremony took place in St. Mary's Church, Portsea, on 1st September 1838, and immediately afterwards they left Portsmouth. Sarah decided to adopt her husband's profession and under the name of Miss Yerret became quite a good actress, but her life must have been terribly hard, for in twenty-five years of moving around the country she gave birth to eleven children, two of whom died in infancy. The other nine, however, all became associated with the theatre world, the most famous being Ellen, Kate and

[1] Vol. 3 of the *Proceedings of the Portsmouth Commissioners, 1816–1838;* ref. no. G/ICQ 1/3, page 210.

W. R. and B. Grossmith both achieved some degree of success as juvenile actors and, although they left the stage, their descendants included Weedon, the elder and younger George, and Ena.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

Positively for ONE Benefit NIGHT Only.----THEATRE, PORTSMOUTH.
THIS EVENING, MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1839.
*** THE THEATRE WILL BE THOROUGHLY WARMED.
THE NOBILITY, GENTRY, AND PUBLIC GENERALLY, ARE RESPECTFULLY INFORMED
MASTER B. GROSSMITH, THE GREAT JUVENILE MONO-DRAMATIC ACTOR,
MY COUSIN TOM!
OR CHAMBERS IN LINCOLNS I.N.N.
POETS, PROCTORS, & DOCTORS!
OR A LAUGH AT LIFE.
EYES RIGHT! OR THE SHORT SIGHTED GENTLEMAN.
BOXES 2s.—PIT 1s.—GALLERY 6d. Children under 12 years of age HALF-PRICE to Boxes and Pit.

Fred Terry. Anyone interested in the history of Portsmouth and the stage should not fail to read Marguerite Steen's fascinating story *A Pride of Terrys*. The Davenport management was also to have some connection with another native of Portsmouth, Charles Dickens, whose *Nicholas Nickleby* gave the Portsmouth theatre a permanent place in stage history. The characters in this book dealing with the theatre have been the subject of much speculation over the years and various theories have been advanced as to the prototypes of the Crummles troupe. The three most popular choices have been Jean Davenport as the 'Infant Phenomenon', Billy Floyer as Folair and T. D. Davenport as Vincent Crummles. The first is the most likely, the second is based on a slight similarity in names, but the third seems doubtful as Saunders had sought the views of some of the older residents but none had been able to identify any of the company with the description of Crummles. Dickens certainly came to Portsmouth while he was writing *Nickleby*, but whether he visited the theatre or met the players is not known. Forster, who was with him, makes no mention of it nor is it clear when the visit took place. If the description in the novel is based on either seeing the stage or being told about it there seems little doubt it was before the redecoration took place in readiness for the February 1838 opening, and in this case he could have seen old playbills advertising the Davenport company which were probably still displayed on the walls. A positive solution seems very unlikely, for the works of Dickens have been subjected to a more minute examination than those of any other English writer, and the answer would surely have been revealed by now.

The theatre re-opened for a normal season under the management of William Shalders, having been completely redecorated, larger box lobbies constructed and a full orchestra and ballet introduced. *The Hampshire Telegraph* was enthusiastic throughout the whole season and the following extracts give some idea of the success achieved by Shalders – 'boxes literally crowded with beauty and fashion' – 'tumultuous applause' – 'the orchestra of which we cannot speak too highly'. It should not be assumed from these comments that the press was exuberant from a sense of local pride, as Mr. Morton was to discover by a devastating report on his Alonzo. He was told that he had not one attribute, nor ever would have one, to recommend him to the stage. Shalders had with him on the management side a Mrs. Penson who must have been quite a character, for Edward Stirling in his *Old Drury Lane* describes her as 'a rather illiterate and eccentric old lady who attended rehearsals, made out bills, paid salaries and took money at the door for boxes, pit and gallery'. Boys would be allowed in if they brought her pears, new-laid eggs or cabbages, but because of her weak eyesight young naval officers would often try to trick her with bad money. The 1838 season closed on 3rd July after a series of benefit performances for not only players and manager but stage staff and money-takers. Shalders had proved himself not only a good manager and actor, but a very competent man on the practical side of stage work, and it was only fitting that his first year should have proved to be a notable one. Under his direction the theatre continued to prosper for a few more years, maintaining a high standard, but as the population spread further afield to Landport business began to decline. A Miss Connor appears to have taken over the direction in 1842 and a few extracts from a poem in the *Sunday Times* in October of that year will suffice to show why the downward trend began.

The Grecian Saloon was renamed the Landport Theatre in October 1843, and was closed in 1850.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

An interesting example of the temporary use of the old Theatre Royal when plays were not being performed.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

GRECIAN SALOON

Mary-le-Bone Street, Landport.

OPEN EVERY EVENING.

THE
LAST NIGHT
OF
Mr. PERCY's
ENGAGEMENT,
And Mr. COX'S Dissolving Views.

On SATURDAY, OCTOBER the 7th, 1843,

The Entertainments will commence with
A Grand Vocal and Instrumental
CONCERT.

Including the Favorite Waltzes, Quadrilles, &c. of
STRAUSS, MUSARD, LANNER,
And the most Popular Vocal Compositions of the Day.

Overture (Bishop) **By the Band**
Chorus ... "Listen to the Waterfall," ... BY THE COMPANY
Song ... "Dont tell my Mother," ... Miss NETTLE
Song ... "A Thousand a Year," ... Mr. WESTERN
Song ... "Banners of Blue!" ... Mrs. GANNON
Ballad ... "The Peasantry of England," ... Mr. BLAND
Ballad ... "Beautiful Venice," ... Miss ROBINSON
Comic Song ... "The Pawnbroker's Shop," ... Mr. H. LYONS
Ballad ... "Kathleen O'More," ... Miss GORDON
Duet ... "I Love Thee," ... Miss ROBINSON and Mr. BLAND
Aria ... "Come unto these Yellow Sands," ... Mrs. VAUDREY
Comic Song ... "The Margate Steamer," ... Mr. WARDE
Ten Minutes Allowed.

Set of Waltzes - (A la Strauss) - By the Band
Song. "The Tyrolese Fortune Teller," Miss WILLIAMS
NAUTICAL SONG, "The Bay of Biscay," MR. ROSIER
CHARACTER SONG, "I SHOULD LIKE TO MARRY," Mr. PERCY
GRAND POLISH MAZOURKA.
Mesdames GORDON and NETTLE, and Messrs. SHALDERS and T. FRY.
Song, (Flute Obligato, Mr. Smith,) ... "The Mocking Bird," ... Miss ROBINSON
Song ... "The Last Shilling," ... Mr. BLAND
Ten Minutes Allowed.

Overture - (Kotswara) - By the Band
TO BE FOLLOWED BY A
Budget of Mirth & Harmony.
SONG "Come Live with me and be my Love," Miss WILLIAMS
Comic Song. (in Character) **"The Wonderful Telescope." Mr. PERCY**
Scotch Song, (in Character,) ... "The Lass of Gouria," ... Mrs. VAUDREY
GROTESQUE DANCE - MR. T. FRY
Ballad ... "Wapping Old Stairs," ... Miss ROBINSON
NAUTICAL PARODY, "BARNEY BUNTLING" MR. ROSIER
Song ... "Kate Marney," ... Miss GORDON
Comic Song, (in Character,) ... "Just-starve-us," ... Mr. H. LYONS
Song ... "The Ladies Club," ... Mrs. GANNON
Character Song, "Wanted a Donkey," Mr. PERCY
Song (in character) ... "The Merry Little Lad," ... Miss NETTLE
Scotch Ballad ... "A Man's a Man for a' that," ... Mr. BLAND
Extravaganza ... "The Downfall of Punch," ... Mr. WARDE
Ten Minutes Allowed.

SET OF QUADRILLES ... (A LA MUSARD) ... BY THE BAND.
After which, **Mr. COX** will exhibit a Splendid Series of
Dissolving Views
By the Oxy-hydrogen Lime Light, upon the same principle as the Polytechnic.

VIEWS.	*AIRS.*
1 Kircudbright Abbey	Rise Gentle Moon
2 The Chase	The Sea
3 The Engagement	'Twas in Trafalgar Bay
4 The Capture	Rule Britannia
5 Portrait of Nelson	See the Conquering Hero comes
6 The Black Draught	Oh dear what can the matter be
7 Ruins of Dussenback (Summer)	Swearing Death
8 Ditto (Winter)	Robbin's Petition
9 The Horse Drinking	Over the Water to Charlie
10 The Bay of Naples	The Barcarole
11 Interior Netley Abbey	The Joy Green
12 The Castle of Chillon	Come to Me
13 Giants Causeway	Land of the West
14 Ship at Anchor	Anchor's Weighed
15 Queen and Prince Albert	God Save the Queen
16 Adieu	

Private and Stage Boxes, 1s.—Side Boxes (including a Refreshment Ticket) 1s.—Stalls, 6d.—Pit, (including a Refreshment Ticket) 6d.
Places may be secured and the Box Plan seen at the Office of the Establishment, every day from 10 till 3 o'Clock.
NO ENCORES ALLOWED. CHILDREN IN ARMS NOT ADMITTED.
Doors Open at Six, and commence positively at a Quarter before Seven o'Clock. The Entertainments will conclude punctually at Eleven.
Managing Director, Mr. T. E. BELL. Stage Manager Mr. W. SHALDERS. Leader of the Band, Mr. CANDY.

Gardner, Printer, 6, Queen Street, Portsea.

THEATRE ROYAL, Portsmouth, now converted into a Spacious and
MAGNIFICENT AMPHITHEATRE,
Will continue Open for a limited Period with
COOKE'S
Company of Equestrians and Splendid Stud of Horses.

MONDAY, JULY the 9th, 1849.
ENTIRE CHANGE OF PERFORMANCE.
FASHIONABLE BOX NIGHT.
Being Under the Patronage of
THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL
THE MAYOR.

The Beautiful "REINDEER F"
For the First Time.
QUEEN MAB'S CHARGER

PYRAMIDS ON 3 HORSES
POMPEY'S PILLAR.

FOR THE FIRST TIME HERE, a Grand Dramatic Spectacle, produced with great splendour, New Dresses, Properties, and rich Paraphernalia, calling forth the whole resources of Mr. Cooke's Establishment, with extra auxiliary aid, under the immediate direction and personal superintendence of **Mr Arthur Nelson**, entitled

JOAN of ARC
THE MAID OF ORLEANS!

Prince Charles of France .... **Mr. COOKE**
Beauvais, a General conspiring against the Prince .... **SANTA AMESOU**
Scales, his adherent .... **Mr. CLARKE**
Richemont, Chalons, treacherous French Generals .... **Mr. MACKETT, Mr. RYLAND**
De Cameral, Joan of Arc's Father ... **Mr. PROUDLEY** **Valianto**, Pink of the Valley ... **Mr. NELSON**
Florine, a young Soldier ... **Mr. LEE** **Lucelle**, Joan of Arc's Sister ... **Miss COOKE**
Joan of Arc .... **Mrs. FRANCE**
Nobles, Judges, Officers, Priests, Soldiers, Peasants, Ladies, Nuns, Choristers, Executioner, &c., by numerous Auxiliaries.

PROGRAMME OF INCIDENTS:
COURT OF CHARLES—The Embassy to expell the King from the Throne of France—'Tis refused—**Preparations for Battle**—French Village—De Cameral's Inn—"Which is the man?"—A lady with two strings to her bow—"I will be a soldier!"
JOAN'S APPEARANCE ON THE BRIDGE!
Her prophetic greeting—THE VISION WHICH OFFERS THE CROWN OF FRANCE!—"It shall be done! Follow me not! Ask no further;—I go the commissioned MESSENGER OF HEAVEN!—**The Introduction of Joan to Charles**—"Which is the Prince?"—The disguise—Joan has seen the King in her dreams and lays the sword at her Monarch's feet—Valianto in a pretty pickle—***Comic Song—"I'm a nobby little Soldier!"***—the man no match for a woman—Surrenders at discretion
Siege of Orleans—Charles is Wounded—Joan of Arc Victorious!
The enemy's banner is trampled on—GRAND TABLEAU!
THE CORONATION OF CHARLES AT RHEIMS!
Great Procession of Priests, Warriors, and Nobles—CHORUS, "Hail! Hail! Hail!"—Pride of a subject's heart—TREACHERY of RICHMONT and CHALONS—Joan of Arc is betrayed, seized, overpowered—Condemned to be BURNT TO DEATH!—
THE BLAZING PYRE!!!—Procession to the Place of Execution.
"FAREWELL FATHER! FAREWELL FRANCE!"
"Is there no hope?"—"Yes! a rescue! a rescue!"—King Charles delivers the Maid of Orleans from her AWFUL FATE—Destruction of the traitor Beauvais and his Army!—GRAND FINALE!
TRIUMPH OF INNOCENCE!! AND JOAN OF ARC.

First time here, Great Olympian Exercises, and extraordinary feats of the
ROMAN YOUTHS!!
OR, HORSEMAN OF HIPPODROME.
By Messrs. Mackett, Clarke, and Barlow.
On Six prancing Coursers; exhibiting striking arena scenes, and portraying some daring EQUESTRIAN PASTIMES, of the Ancient Sports of the Curriculum.

A new Extravaganza Scene of the Circle, called,
CUPID IN A SOOT-BAG!
OR, THE MISCHIEVOUS SWEEPS.
Young Sooty .... Master NELSON, the Young Equestrian (who will display his elegant Horsemanship),
Blackface, jun. .... Master AMESOU
Little Fusile .... Master ALBERT NELSON
Old Chum ... Mr. BARLOW Riding Master ... Mr COOKE
Clown and Locum Tenens ... Mr. NELSON
Squire Muddlebrain and Lady, anxious to learn the Art of Riding ... Messrs. PROUDLEY and CLARKE.

Mr. George Ryland the Renowned Equestrian, will appear in a varied routine of Characters on Horseback. He will enter the Arena as the
Jolly Falstaff Marching through Coventry,
At the head of his Ragged Band. From this he will change to
SHYLOCK THE JEW!!
Whom Shakespeare drew. By a rapid transition he will be metamorphosed to
RICHARD III.

Mr. Clarke will vary the Scenes with his unparalleled Antipodean Arguments, called THE FOLK SPRITE, or,
WORLD REVERSED!

Mr. Mackett the celebrated Equestrian, will appear on his fleet Charger as THE
WILD HUNTER of the PRAIRIES

In course of the evening, the wonderful Performance of **Santa Amesou and Son**, who will, on this occasion, and first time here, introduce
Another new Gymnastic Entertainment!!

After the Equestrian Entertainment an Interval of Eight Minutes will elapse.

NOTICE.—The Inhabitants of Gosport and the Public in general, are respectfully informed that arrangements have been made, for this Night only, for the Floating Bridge to run at the conclusion of the Performance.

These Performances will be repeated To-morrow and Wednesday.

CLEVER CLOWN and WIT, Mr. NELSON, THE YORICK OF THE EQUESTRIAN ARENA.
Proprietor and Director ... Mr. THOMAS COOKE Conductor and Master of the Circle ... Mr. PROUDLEY
Buffo Elastique ... Mr. DEAN Leader of the Orchestra ... Mr. B. CHARLTON

Doors will be open every Evening at a Quarter before Seven o'Clock, and the performances will commence at half-past Seven to a minute.
PRICES OF ADMISSION.—Dress Circle, 3s.; Upper Boxes, 2s.; Side Boxes, 1s. 6d.; Pit, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.
Children under 10 years of Age to the Dress Circle, 1s. 6d.; Upper Boxes, 1s.; Side Boxes and Pit, 6d.
NO HALF-PRICE TO THE GALLERY.
Smoking is not permitted in the Amphitheatre.—The Box Office is open every Day from Eleven till Three.—No places can at any time be secured, unless a corresponding number of Tickets are taken. Carriages to be in attendance at half-past Ten o'Clock.
The ART OF RIDING and properly Managing the Horse, taught daily at the Amphitheatre: Cards of Terms to be had of the Box-Keeper, or of Mr. COOKE, Jun. RIDING MASTER.
Comptroller of the Bill department, Mr. MURRAY, to whom all Letters must be addressed regarding the non-delivery of the Bills.

A GRAND MID-DAY PERFORMANCE,
Will take place, on THURSDAY, July 12th, at Two o'Clock,
Doors open at half-past One; on which occasion the Children belonging to the various Charity Schools of the Town, **WILL BE ADMITTED FREE**, if attended by their Teachers.

J. WILLIAMS, PRINTER, PORTSEA.

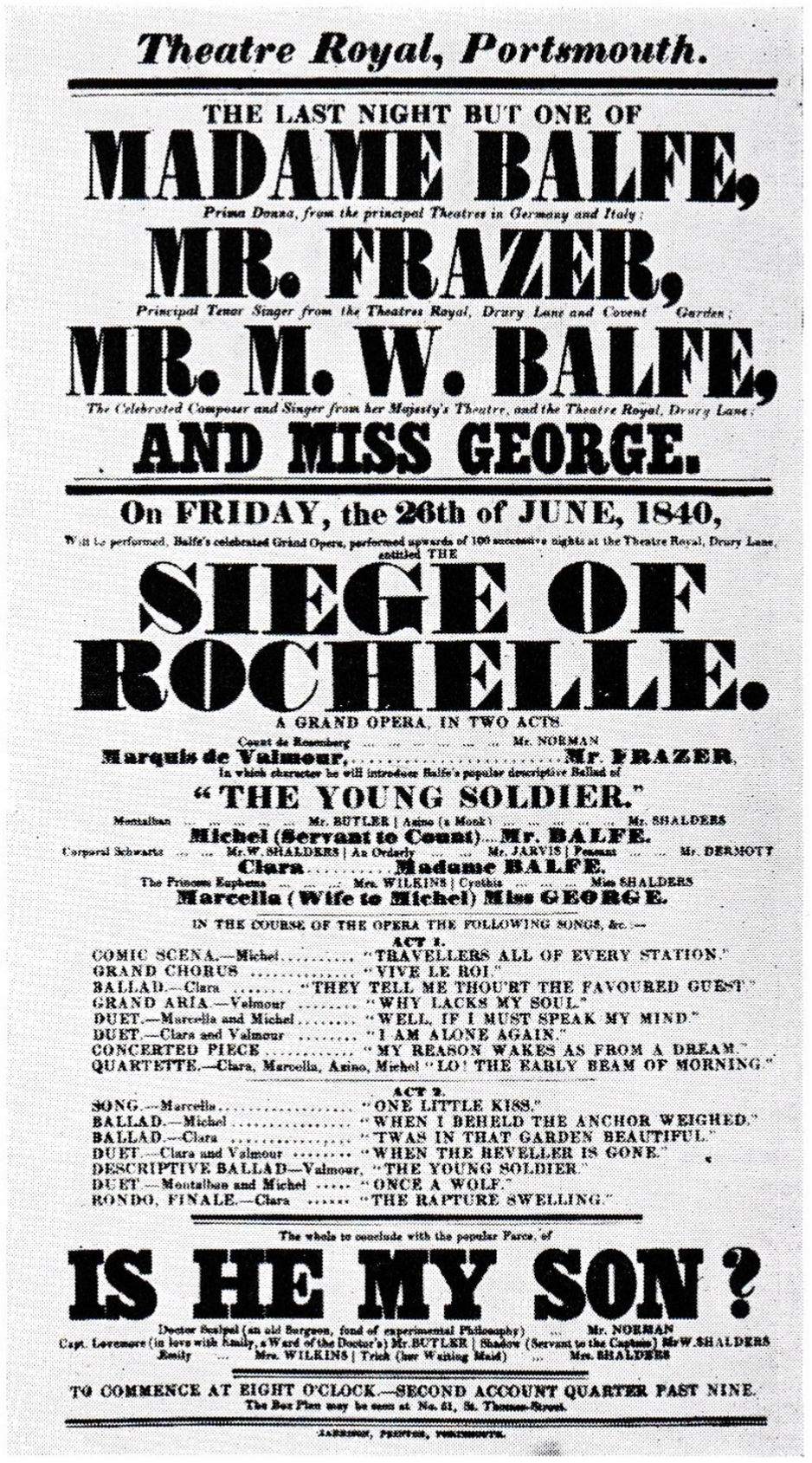
'Always seems to act in Nature's spite,
And on and off the stage she's never right.
How different Portsmouth! – once thy stage so famed,
When Maxfield's tastes, or graceful Shalders reigned.

Thy muse is out . . .
She rules, and, like many silly wenches,
She reigns triumphantly o'er empty benches'

A rival theatre opened in March 1843, under the title of 'The Grecian Saloon', but when the proprietor, Samuel Hogg, applied for a licence there were difficulties, as just after he had erected it a new act was passed affecting certain conditions. In a 'humble memorial' which he presented to the justices, a signed copy of which is in the City Record Office,[1] he stated that the building had cost him over £1,150 and that he had engaged a company which was costing him about £50 a week. He craved leave to re-name it the Landport Theatre, undertook to remove the pawnbroking business from the premises, and if so desired to discontinue the sale of excisable liquor in the said theatre. The licence was granted in October 1843 and six months later he leased the High Street Theatre, running the two with the same company playing alternately at each. This arrangement continued until June 1850 when he went bankrupt, and in August the Landport Theatre was put up for sale. The advertisement described it as being in Marylebone Street with a considerable frontage on Green Row (the former name of a part of Belgrave Street) and as accommodating 700. The High Street Theatre had been reduced to playing one night a week and this time there was to be no revival, for in its remaining four years its lease passed through at least as many hands, the last holder being Mr. Sidney, who was forced to close it through a disastrous financial failure. Before the end of 1854 it was sold to the War Office for £3,500 and two years later was demolished to make room for an extension to the Cambridge Barracks.

A few general points about the early theatre in the town will not be out of place before passing on to the new theatre centre in Landport. The professional season usually lasted about sixty days, but it should not be assumed that this was the sole use made of the building. It was frequently taken over for amateur performances by the officers of the garrison and their ladies. These were usually glittering occasions under the patronage of a high-ranking officer or some government personality, as indeed were the professional performances. Everything, however, was on a lavish scale, the programmes and sometimes the playbills often being printed on pink silk. Those who are interested can see examples by applying to the Central Reference Library, which contains a number of beautiful specimens in the playbill collection. The theatre was also used for concerts, and in the winter for balls and assemblies on the lines of the Opera House in the Haymarket, London, until Mr. Bradley built his elegant Assembly Room at the Crown Inn. Two great dangers faced all theatres in those days – riot and fire – but although Portsmouth experienced the former on a few occasions, it was fortunate to

Only three years after his appearance in Portsmouth, Michael Balfe achieved his greatest success, when The Bohemian Girl was produced at Drury Lane.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.



Theatre Royal, Portsmouth.

THE LAST NIGHT BUT ONE OF

MADAME BALFE,

Prima Donna, from the principal Theatres in Germany and Italy;

MR. FRAZER,

Principal Tenor Singer from the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane and Covent Garden;

MR. M. W. BALFE,

The Celebrated Composer and Singer from her Majesty's Theatre, and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane;

AND MISS GEORGE.

On FRIDAY, the 26th of JUNE, 1840,

Will be performed, Balfe's celebrated Grand Opera, performed upwards of 100 successive nights at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, entitled THE

SIEGE OF ROCHELLE.

A GRAND OPERA, IN TWO ACTS.

Count de Rosenberg ... ... Mr. NORMAN
Marquis de Valmour, ... Mr. FRAZER,
In which character he will introduce Balfe's popular descriptive Ballad of
"THE YOUNG SOLDIER."
Montalban ... ... Mr. BUTLER | Anino (a Monk) ... ... Mr. SHALDERS
Michel (Servant to Count)... Mr. BALFE.
Corporal Schwartz ... ... Mr. W. SHALDERS | An Orderly ... ... Mr. JARVIS | Peasant ... ... Mr. DERMOTT
Clara ... Madame BALFE.
The Princess Euphemia ... ... Mrs. WILKINS | Cynthia ... ... Miss SHALDERS
Marcella (Wife to Michel) Miss GEORGE.

IN THE COURSE OF THE OPERA THE FOLLOWING SONGS, &c. —

ACT 1.

COMIC SCENA.—Michel ..... "TRAVELLERS ALL OF EVERY STATION."
GRAND CHORUS ..... "VIVE LE ROI."
BALLAD.—Clara ..... "THEY TELL ME THOU'RT THE FAVOURED GUEST"
GRAND ARIA.—Valmour ..... "WHY LACKS MY SOUL."
DUET.—Marcella and Michel ..... "WELL, IF I MUST SPEAK MY MIND."
DUET.—Clara and Valmour ..... "I AM ALONE AGAIN."
CONCERTED PIECE ..... "MY REASON WAKES AS FROM A DREAM."
QUARTETTE.—Clara, Marcella, Anino, Michel "LO! THE EARLY BEAM OF MORNING."

ACT 2.

SONG.—Marcella ..... "ONE LITTLE KISS."
BALLAD.—Michel ..... "WHEN I BEHELD THE ANCHOR WEIGHED."
BALLAD.—Clara ..... "TWAS IN THAT GARDEN BEAUTIFUL."
DUET.—Clara and Valmour ..... "WHEN THE REVELLER IS GONE."
DESCRIPTIVE BALLAD—Valmour, "THE YOUNG SOLDIER."
DUET.—Montalban and Michel ..... "ONCE A WOLF."
RONDO, FINALE.—Clara ..... "THE RAPTURE SWELLING."

The whole to conclude with the popular Farce, of

IS HE MY SON?

Doctor Scalpel (an old Surgeon, fond of experimental Philosophy) ... Mr. NORMAN
Capt. Lovemore (in love with Emily, a Ward of the Doctor's) Mr. BUTLER | Shadow (Servant to the Captain) Mr. W. SHALDERS
Emily ... Mrs. WILKINS | Trish (her Waiting Maid) ... Mrs. SHALDERS

TO COMMENCE AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.—SECOND ACCOUNT QUARTER PAST NINE.
The Box Plan may be seen at No. 61, St. Thomas-Street.

HARRISON, PRINTER, PORTSMOUTH.

[1] Ref. no. 3, bundle number CC5/18.

escape the latter, despite risks sometimes taken. It seems remarkable, especially considering the somewhat crude lighting of those days, that a production such as *Life in London* should have avoided trouble, billed as it was to end with the 'New Flaming Finish' using two thousand lights. The wide variety of entertainment given in one evening has been mentioned under Edmund Kean's benefit night and this style continued for some years in the Landport theatres. Another interesting feature of the later years in High Street was the first indication of twice-nightly entertainment, one advertisement stating that the performance would commence at six o'clock, and 'on the second account' at nine o'clock. The old theatre, irrespective of its forerunners, had served the people of Portsmouth for almost a century, and had set many of its young actors, actresses and managers on the road to success, some even becoming stars in their day. It had presented many well-known players from Covent Garden, Drury Lane, the Haymarket and other London and provincial theatres, some of them making a return visit to the stage on which they had first appeared. Many of them, although achieving some degree of fame in their day, are almost unknown today, except to those who are familiar with the early history of the theatre. There may have been others who played in the town, for between 1810 and 1820 Richardson's great portable theatre paid several visits, but unfortunately few details are available, although it is known that Edmund Kean appeared with this company in his early years. Among those who are known to have played at the theatre from the early years of the eighteenth century to the closing of the theatre are Braham (the leading English tenor of his day), Mrs. Abington, Balfe (composer of *The Bohemian Girl*) and Madame Balfe, Brereton, Madame Catalini (a great soprano), Kitty Clive, J. P. Cooke, Miss Cushman, Mrs. Dancer, Clara Fisher, Forrest (a famous American tragic actor), Master William Grossmith (who with his brother Benjamin were the first of the famous family to appear on the stage), Incledon, Edmund Kean, Charles Kean and his wife (who lived at Keydell House, Horndean, and are buried at Catherington), Louise Keeley and her husband Montague Williams, Stephen Kemble, Liston, Macklin, Macready, Marston, Mathews (the Irish entertainer), Mr. and Mrs. Mattocks, Moody, Mrs. Nisbett, O'Keefe, Miss O'Neill, Sothern, Johann Strauss the Elder (with his Viennese orchestra), Vandenhoff, Madame Vestris (an attractive singer and accomplished burlesque actress), Kitty White (Mrs. Burden), and Tate Wilkinson. They all played their part in assuring the old Theatre Royal a permanent place in the history of provincial theatres. It had opened its doors in a cloud of dust and finished as a heap of bricks and mortar, and thus ended a story of courageous enterprise, hard struggles, unselfish devotion, rewards and disappointments, but the end was not quite as final as it at first appeared. The spirit which prevailed through all those years was soon to influence others and almost before the dust had settled on the High Street site a new theatre was being contemplated.

In June 1854 the Landport Hall, which was to be used for meetings, assemblies and other forms of entertainment, was opened on the site of the old Racquet Court next door to the White Swan. It might well have continued to serve that purpose indefinitely had it not been for the opportune arrival in the town of one Henry Rutley, who, after becoming licensee of the old inn, leased the Hall. He was an enterprising man by no means unfamiliar with public entertainment, having been part owner of a circus, but more important still he had gained experience of theatre management in London. It was not surprising therefore that he should have conceived the idea of converting the Landport Hall into a theatre, and in February 1856 he took the first step by applying for a theatrical licence. His legal adviser put forward a very good case, arguing that it was an anomaly that such a large town as Portsmouth should be without a theatre and giving an assurance that every safeguard would be taken to ensure its proper conduct. The magistrates granted a provisional licence for six months, but on being told that it would take that length of time to get the theatre ready they agreed to extend the period to nine months, though they insisted that the communication with the White Swan should be bricked up and not merely temporarily closed. Mr. Rutley immediately set to work with a will, and as a result of his labours and those of William Shalders Junior, who carried out the decorations and painted the scenery, the conversion was completed to the satisfaction of everyone. The New Theatre Royal opened on Monday, 29th September 1856, with that old favourite of the High Street patrons, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *Founded on Facts*. The house was full every night and on the opening day people had to be turned away because every part of the house was 'crowded to excess'. Mr. W. Grisdale was the leading tragic actor and was supported by William Shalders Junior, who had been a popular figure with the old Theatre Royal audiences in the High Street, where he had in addition to performing and scene-painting been acting

manager. He received particular praise for his playing of Mr. Sceptic in the second of the two plays. The provisional licence expired in November and when a renewal was applied for the magistrates unhesitatingly granted one for the full twelve months, expressing their satisfaction at the manner in which the theatre had been conducted, not a single complaint having been made against it since its opening. The initial success was maintained and by the time of Mr. Rutley's death in 1874 it was in a flourishing condition. It then passed into the hands of Mr. H. C. Hughes, who continued until 1882, when Mr. J. W. Boughton took over full control. He joined the staff as an assistant to Mr. Rutley, probably just before his death, and continued with Mr. Hughes, gaining experience all the time which was to prove invaluable when he took over the management. He was a man of considerable energy and vision and in just over thirty years made many improvements to the building and was able to attract an ever increasing number of top-class players. He was perhaps fortunate in this respect as the theatre world was undergoing a change, the old stock companies being replaced by touring companies, but despite this he continued his policy of retaining the local flavour in his pantomimes, and very good they were. The rising status of the theatre and the great improvements made to the building itself show that he was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. In 1868 a certain amount of reconstruction took place, and this was followed in 1874 by minor exterior and major interior alterations, but the first extensive change came ten years later when a considerable amount of rebuilding took place and for the first time in Portsmouth an experienced theatre architect was engaged. Mr. Boughton was naturally anxious not to have his theatre out of action for longer than necessary and to avoid this took the unusual step, for those days, of having the new walls erected in May before the theatre closed. The result was that he was able to reopen in the new building by the beginning of August. This was still not enough to satisfy Mr. Boughton's dreams, and in 1900 he launched another scheme, this time to add considerably to the seating accommodation, though in the process much of the theatre had to be reconstructed. Frank Matcham, probably the most experienced architect on theatre design in the country, was engaged and so well had everything been planned that the theatre was closed for only four months, from the beginning of April to the beginning of August. The companies booked for the Royal and the whole of the theatre staff, including the orchestra, were transferred to the Prince's during this period of closure, this being made possible by the amalgamation of the two theatres on 29th December 1897. The reconstruction resulted in the present-day theatre and as its future looks so precarious it will not be out of place to describe it in some detail. The old stage was absorbed into the auditorium, and a new stage, property rooms, scene dock, dressing and rehearsal rooms were built on additional land at the back of the theatre. Entrances were rearranged and increased in number and, with the exception of the gallery, were covered by a glass and iron canopy. Public comfort was fully catered for both inside and outside the auditorium. The new stage was one of the largest in the country and was capable of taking the most elaborate scenery from London productions. Its depth had been increased from 36 to 65 feet and its width of 56 feet, coupled with its wide emergency exits, gave an adequate run-in for horses which were sometimes required to dash across the stage. The whole of the interior was lavishly redecorated and the charming colour scheme combined with raised ornamentation was described as being fascinating to the eye without dazzling. The scrolls and panels with suggestions of blue sky and birds gave a most pleasing effect. Eight new boxes were provided along the sides of the dress circle and were furnished with rich embossed plush draperies. The redecoration of the fronts of the upper and dress circles introduced ornamentation suggestive of the naval and military importance of Portsmouth. The boxes were divided by the bows of ships with figureheads and the dress circle front was composed of dolphins, mermaids, anchors and life-belts. Even the light fittings were nautical, being formed of brass anchors. All this gave the theatre an atmosphere of originality by getting away from the more conventional auditorium adornments. The theatre re-opened on 6th August 1900 with a cast which included Mrs. Patrick Campbell, George Arliss and Gerald du Maurier, the opening play being *Magda*, followed during the week by *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Fantasticks*. The large holiday audiences could hardly have wished for more – a brand new theatre and a great actress appearing in two of her finest roles, Paula in Pinero's play and the title role of *Magda*, in which some critics ranked her with Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse.

The Royal and Prince's having come under the same control, it seems appropriate to deal with the latter at this point. It was first opened in Lake Road in 1868 as a circus but after one unsuccessful season the proprietor, Mr. Helby, obtained a licence to produce stage plays. A spacious gallery was erected,

the old circle turned into pit stalls, a large stage installed and some good scenery painted, and in December 1869 it opened as the Royal Albert Theatre. The *Hampshire Telegraph* report of the first night can hardly have given Mr. Helby much encouragement, as this extract will show. 'The first piece was produced with some really excellent scenery, but of the bulk of the performance the less said the better. . . . The ballet . . . was one of the greatest failures we ever remember having witnessed. We must not, however, cast the whole of the blame on the dancers, for their efforts were impeded by the band, the members of which did not seem to know their business properly, and the music was at times left to one individual'. It is hardly surprising that the management announced its intention of making several changes in the company. In 1872 the name was changed to The Prince's Theatre, but despite a number of changes in management, during which there had been some association with several music halls and the Theatre Royal, it still failed to make much headway until Messrs. Nance and Bailey became lessees. This was the turning point, and as they were succeeded by Mr. H. C. Hughes the prospects for the future appeared good, but in April 1882 the theatre was destroyed by fire and before it was rebuilt in 1891 Mr. Hughes had died. In the meantime, however, Mr. Boughton had become interested and in 1884 purchased some additional land and the old site in readiness for the erection of the new theatre. He was now managing director of Portsmouth Theatres Ltd., and ran them in a much closer association than hitherto. The new Prince's, while never achieving the same standard as the Royal, played its part in the entertainment of the public. It presented variety, served as a popular venue for repertory companies, and, above all, became the home of melodrama. It was host to many well-known players, including (when it was still the Royal Albert Theatre) Céline Céleste, the famous French dancer and pantomimist. In 1924 it suffered the same fate as many theatres and became a cinema, having been sold for a ridiculously low price. J. Grant Anderson, who was presenting repertory at the time, took his company to Gosport, and, happily, is still touring and acting. The final death-blow to the popular old theatre came in August 1940 when a German bomb struck it while a film was being shown to an audience mostly of children. Fortunately the casualties were light, but the damage was too great to justify rebuilding after the war, even had there been sufficient demand.

Earlier in the century several schemes for another theatre were being contemplated by outside interests

The King's Theatre, Albert Road, Southsea became the sixth theatre in the town when it opened in 1907. Today it is the only one remaining open.

By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

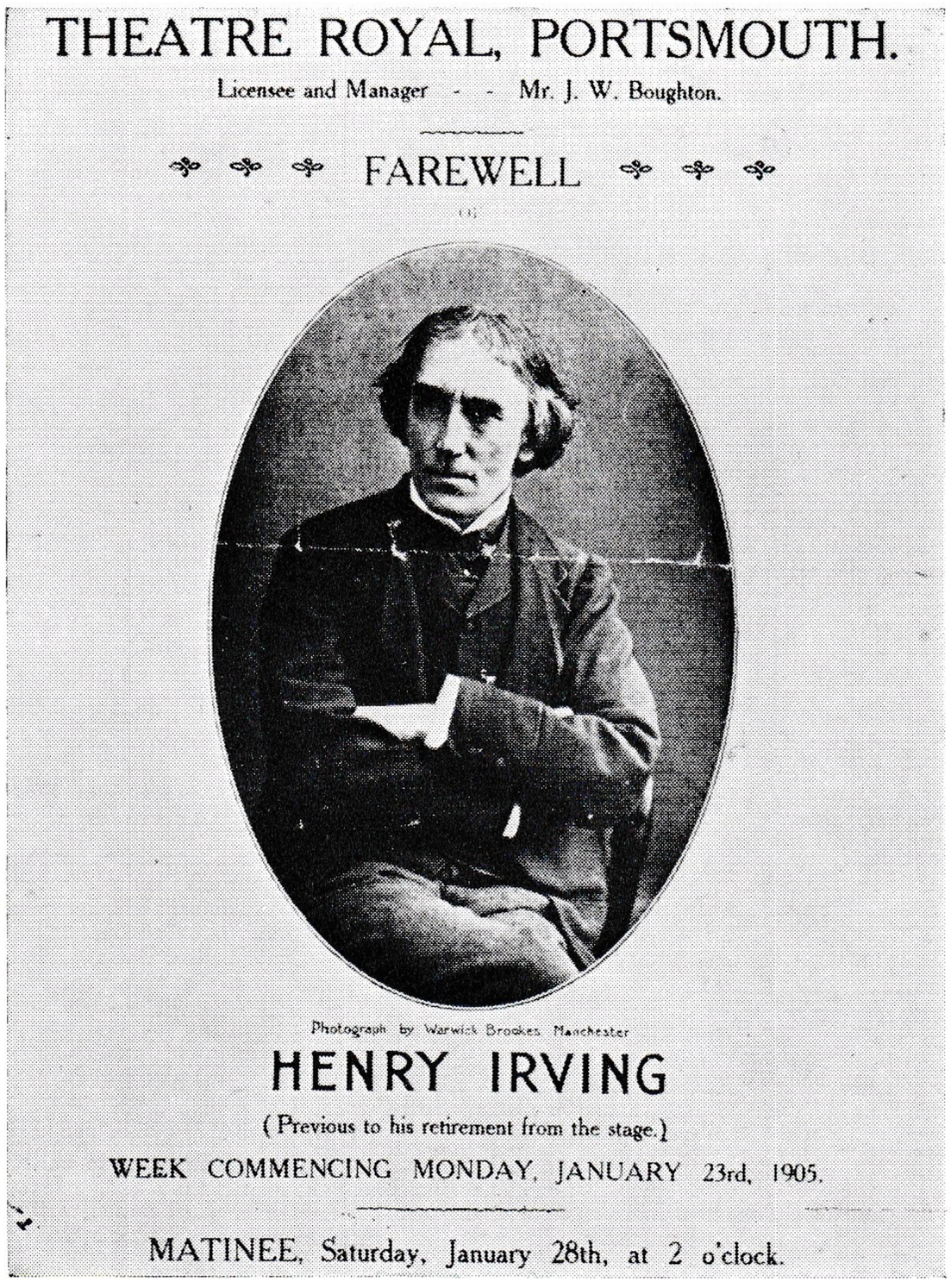
and one even got as far as having its plans passed by the local authority. It was to be in Elm Grove, and judging by an illustration in the *Hampshire Telegraph* would have been a very imposing building. Mr. Boughton had other ideas and immediately took steps to build a new theatre under the aegis of the Portsmouth Theatres Company. He paid the cost of the initial transactions without consulting the company and the project, which had been more or less secret, was eventually revealed at a meeting on 13th June 1906. The money he had laid out was subsequently reimbursed and the theatre opened on 30th September 1907, in Albert Road, Southsea, as the King's Theatre, with H. B. Irving, one of Sir Henry's sons, appearing

in *The Lyons Mail*, *The Bells* and *Charles the First*. Mr. Boughton continued to direct the three theatres until his death in 1914, when Mr. Peter Davey was appointed manager. He maintained the traditions built up by his predecessor and even during the First World War succeeded in keeping all three theatres going. His pantomimes, which he created with the aid of his talented wife, were the delight not only of Portsmouth people, but of thousands from the surrounding district. He retired in 1936 and Mr. W. E. C. Sperring took over control of the two remaining theatres, and with it the competition of cinemas and broadcast drama. This became so powerful that the King's had to switch to films for a time and the Royal for an even longer period, from 1932 until 1948. When the latter re-opened as a theatre there had been yet another change in management, Mr. Charles Clarke taking over after the death of Mr. Sperring. He continued to bring to the theatre many of the leading actors and actresses, the annual pantomimes kept up their reputation, and generally speaking the position was reasonably satisfactory until the outbreak of the Second World War, when in common with the other theatres and cinemas in the town the King's was closed. It was soon re-opened, however, and during the winter of 1939 and the greater part of 1940 presented London companies in current plays. Although it was undamaged by enemy action the winter blitzes of 1940–41 forced the King's to close its doors again, and it remained closed until 1942 when the Libraries and Museums Committee commenced a series of Sunday concerts, the success of which encouraged Mr. Clarke to reopen the theatre for plays.

In September 1948 the Theatre Royal assumed its proper rôle and once again Portsmouth Theatres Ltd., had two 'live' theatres in full swing – but difficult times were ahead. Mr. Clarke died in January 1949, and in 1956, this time under the control of Mrs. E. M. Sperring, the Royal once again had to close and so apparently ended one hundred years of entertainment. In 1957, however, a resident company leased the theatre under the leadership of Hector Ross, Kim Peacock and June Sylvaine, and for a time it looked as though they might succeed. They certainly had a fund of ideas and started a club which they hoped would be a guarantee of audiences, but after the initial enthusiasm support dwindled and it looked as though yet another closure was imminent when suddenly in 1958 a local industrialist, Commander R. B. Cooper, stepped in and announced his intention of negotiating a long-term lease to enable the company to continue. In the following year he decided not to renew at the Royal, but to take over the lease of the King's, transferring the company there. The closing months of 1959 saw somewhat of an upheaval, for Hector Ross and June Sylvaine severed their connection with the theatre and Herbert Ray who had been manager also left, his place being taken by James Holland, who some years later was succeeded by Michael de Barras. The King's had certainly had an

The programme for this week included some of Irving's greatest successes such as The Bells, The Lady of Lyons, and Becket. Bram Stoker, author of Dracula, appears on the programme as acting manager. He had by 1905 completed 27 years as Irving's manager.

By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.



THEATRE ROYAL, PORTSMOUTH.

Licensee and Manager - - Mr. J. W. Boughton.

FAREWELL

Photograph by Warwick Brookes, Manchester

HENRY IRVING

(Previous to his retirement from the stage.)

WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY, JANUARY 23rd, 1905.

MATINEE, Saturday, January 28th, at 2 o'clock.

equally trying period after the decline of the immediate post-war theatre boom, but by 1962 it seemed to be well on the way to reviving old glories. Prior-to-London productions, annual visits of opera and ballets, first-class touring companies and the annual Christmas pantomimes put it back among the 'Number One' provincial theatres. It appeared to be set fair for the future as it no longer had any theatrical opposition in the town, but the slavish addiction of the public to television, the easy money earned by those appearing on it, coupled with their reluctance to tour, again made the existence of the King's precarious, and Commander Cooper, despite some aid from the Corporation, lost a considerable amount of money. In 1964 his wife, Mrs. Joan Cooper, purchased the theatre in an effort to keep it going and between them they have run it since, but even now it must be a source of constant worry. If the King's fails and the Royal is demolished, a town which fifty years ago had six theatres and which for two hundred years or more counted for something in the theatre world will have nothing but memories of great names and shows.

It would be impossible to include a list of all in this paper, but some at least should be recorded in addition to those already mentioned. Many have appeared at more than one theatre, and to avoid duplication a composite list for the Theatre Royal and the King's will suffice to show the range of entertainment covered over the years. Among the leading actor-managers were Fred Terry, Frank Benson, H. B. Irving, Martin Harvey, Wilson Barrett, Beerbohm Tree, Matheson Lang, and Donald Wolfit. Straight actors and actresses have included Sarah Bernhardt (King's, Royal and Hippodrome), Ellen Terry, Lily Langtry, the Vanburgh sisters, Henry Irving, J. L. Toole, the elder Cocquelin brother, Ivor Novello, Owen Nares, Henry Ainley, Phyllis Neilson-Terry, Margaret Bannerman, Leon M. Lion, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Constance Collier, Sybil Thorndike, Marie Lohr, Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn, Robertson Hare, Tallulah Bankhead, Gracie Fields, Jessie Matthews, Charles Laughton, Anna Neagle, Claudette Colbert, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., George Graves, Carl Brisson, Marie Tempest, Alice Delysia, Josie Collins, Lily Elsie, Bobby Howes, Binnie Hale, Nelson Keys, Seymour Hicks, Yvonne Arnaud, Leslie Henson, Noel Coward, Evelyn Laye, Oscar Asche, Gertrude Lawrence, the Dare sisters, Peggy Ashcroft, Edith Evans, Flora Robson, Clive Brook and Paul Scofield. Vaudeville and revue personalities include Marie Lloyd, Grock, Lily Morris, June, George Robey, Nellie Wallace, Harry Lauder, Hetty King, Ella Shields, Billy Bennett, Tommy Handley, Harry Tate and George Clarke. There are many others equally famous and their omission is due only to having to draw the line somewhere, but perhaps one exception could be made as it must be almost unique. A playbill for 29th August 1868 has the names of no fewer than five members of the Lupino family on it.

These names cover the more conventional type of theatrical production but the full scope of entertainment provided by the three theatres over the years should be briefly recorded. The field was very wide, ranging over Shakespeare, opera, ballet, musical comedy, straight plays (including blood-and-thunder drama), comedy, farce, pantomime (with some remarkable transformation scenes), revue, vaudeville, variety, 'rock and roll', circuses, films, and, what is surely enough to make those enterprising old managers turn in their graves, all-in-wrestling and bingo. Music-halls have barely been mentioned and to deal with them adequately in this paper could only be done by the exclusion of other material. Considerable and prolonged research would be necessary as many sources are vague and contradictory, but a brief outline will show that their story would be just as fascinating as that of the other theatres. In their early days they were almost exclusively associated with public houses and their standards varied considerably. Many were of doubtful repute and were the scene of much disorder, particularly when ships were being paid off. Some, however, achieved for their day quite a high class and were very well conducted. Among these were the Wiltshire Lamb, the Cobden Arms and the Spread Eagle. One of the best known came into being as a result of the sale of the High Street Theatre. It had left the old town without any place of entertainment except the music-rooms attached to some public houses, these being used mainly for sing-songs. In 1854 there arrived in Portsmouth a Mr. William Brown who took over the licence of the Blue Bell in St. Mary's Street. This was probably the old 'Blew Bell' which was known to be in existence as far back as 1701. It had a music room, but this was not good enough for Mr. Brown who decided to build a small music hall in association with his public house, and this was opened in 1856. It was chiefly patronised by soldiers, sailors and their womenfolk, and fights were by no means infrequent. Nevertheless the venture was sufficiently successful to justify a larger and well-equipped hall being built. This was erected over the old hall, with the result that no break occurred, the

The Empire Palace, opened in 1891. In 1913 the name was changed to The Coliseum but again became The Empire in 1950. It was sold and demolished to make way for a super-market in 1958.

By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

last performance in the old building being on Saturday, 18th August 1860, and the first in the new one two days later. It was known as the South of England Music-Hall and patrons were issued with tokens worth 3d which they could exchange inside for two pints of beer. The performances followed the traditional music-hall lines and were presided over by a chairman, one of the most popular being Teddy Genge. Many artists who appeared subsequently became stars in the famous London music-halls. In 1873 Brown retired and sold it to the London Alhambra Company and it proved a gold mine, but in September 1878 it was destroyed by fire. Twelve months later a handsome new one was opened as the New (South of England) Grand Palace. Mr. H. C. Hughes, who it will be remembered was associated with the Royal and the Prince's, became the leesee, but it does not appear to have met with the same success as its predecessor and in 1890 was burnt down. When it was rebuilt the main entrance was located in Gunwharf Road and in its last years it became known as Barnard's Royal Amphitheatre.

Music-halls were also beginning to open in the Landport area and one of the most popular was Vento's Temple of Varieties at the corner of Leonard Street and Lake Road. This was owned by Henry Vento but subsequently passed into the hands of Frank Pearce, who ran it for some twenty-five years. The first thing he did after acquiring it was to repair and completely redecorate it, but on the day it was due to open fire destroyed it. The story goes that on Mr. Pearce being told his hair turned white overnight from shock, and no wonder, for he had put all his money into it. He continued with the show, however, on a piece of waste ground adjoining the burnt-out building and such was the respect of the public for him that they rallied round and helped him to build a new hall. He would stand outside it wearing a top hat, frock coat and high-heeled shoes, and with his locks of silver-grey hair falling to his shoulders must have presented a striking figure. Admission could be gained for as little as 2d, for which the patrons would be given ten turns including acrobats, ventriloquists, vocalists, comedians, sketches and even a film ('The People's Bioscope'). Many famous variety artistes appeared there, including Hetty King, Vesta Victoria, Vesta Tilley (later Lady de Frece), the Lloyd Sisters and some of the Leno family. His two daughters, Lizzie and Hypatia, also performed, one as a singer and the other as a dancer. The hall eventually became Jury's Picture House, then the Palladium Cinema, and is now Blundell's Warehouse. Frank Pearce also figures as the proprietor of St. James's Concert and Variety Hall, which, unlike many of the smaller halls, boasted a small gallery. Correspondents in the *Evening News* some years ago stated that this hall was formerly the Fuller's Hall and this certainly seems feasible as both dates and location fit in. Another variety theatre was opened in 1890 by Frederick Fordham, husband of Bonnie Kate Harvey, a music-hall star of her day. It became known as the People's Popular Palace–the New Alhambra Theatre of Varieties, but its high-sounding title failed to save it from a short life of only two or three years. Mr. Fordham could not have chosen a worse time for not only did the Prince's reopen in 1891 but the Empire had been built and, despite an initial difficulty over a licence, was soon to double the competition against the Alhambra. A full description of the Empire would take up too much space, but suffice to say it was well planned, beautifully decorated and fully equipped for its purpose. Its promenades, so typically in keeping with the variety theatres of those days, and the facility of being able to have a drink while watching a show made it a popular rendezvous for the high-spirited sailors. Their over-exuberance at times caused trouble but they were quickly dealt with by the stalwart 'chuckers out'. The theatre was built by a company of local business men which included Mr. A. W. White and Mr. J. Baggs. In 1913 it closed for a few weeks, was redecorated throughout, refurnished and upholstered, and all the staff smartly dressed, the men being attired in gorgeous new uniforms. Its name was changed to the Coliseum and a packed house gave the star turn a tumultuous welcome, as well they might for it was none other than the Queen of Comédiennes, Marie Lloyd. A reversion to the Empire was made after the renovation in 1950 and a new management took over. It continued to serve the public well with its own particular type of entertainment until it was sold in 1958, and so good was its condition that it would have made an excellent civic theatre.

The Royal, Prince's and Empire held sway until 1907 when a double event occurred which gave Portsmouth five theatres, not counting the South Parade Pier. A new music-hall, the Hippodrome, was opened in May, and a straight theatre, the King's, in September. The latter has already been dealt with under the theatres controlled by Portsmouth Theatres Ltd., but the former was an entirely independent company. It was advertised as 'Portsmouth's New Vaudeville Theatre' controlled by the Portsmouth Hippodrome, Ltd., under the managing directorship of Walter de Freece, and was described as 'the handsomest and

The Hippodrome was the principal music hall from 1907 until its destruction by enemy action in 1941.

By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

most up-to-date theatre in the country, replete with every modern convenience, perfectly ventilated and magnificently lighted,' and at the time it probably was. Built on the corner of Commercial Road and Salem Street it had a frontage of 67 feet and a depth of almost 150 feet, and considering it held slightly over 2000 it was remarkable that the designers had managed to create a very intimate atmosphere. There were three tiers, orchestra stalls, stalls and pit forming the first, the grand circle the second and the gallery the third. A formal opening before an invited audience of about a thousand took place during the week preceding the public opening, the ceremony being performed by Miss Marie Tempest. Although its emphasis was mainly on variety, straight plays, musicals and even circuses were sometimes staged. Most of the leading variety artistes appeared, particularly after the control was taken over by the General Theatre Corporation, under the direction of George Black. The end came in the big blitz of January 1941 when the building was destroyed. There were great hopes after the war that Moss Empires would build a new Hippodrome, and the Corporation after five years of negotiations had agreed to grant a 99 years' lease of the old site plus an extension at the rear. The project ultimately fell through when early in 1955 Moss Empires announced that they were not proceeding with a new theatre. This was probably due to the increasing competition of television and the evidence of the business being done by the other theatres in the town, which after the immediate post-war boom was petering out.

Only one year after the opening of the King's and the Hippodrome the new South Parade Pier was built, and its theatre brought in some additional competition in the summer and occasionally during the Christmas season. In the middle 1930s it was re-seated, the stage was extended and a counterweight system installed which, although simplifying the flying of scenery, reduced the already limited space in the wings. The Pier Theatre has covered almost every type of entertainment over the years, including variety, revues, straight plays, musicals, pantomimes, concerts, recitals, concert parties, band, summer and puppet shows, and amateur productions by the leading local companies. These were restricted after the war to the Portsmouth Players who could always pack the house, the Arts Theatre and the Southsea Shakespeare Actors. One of the highlights of the Arts Theatre productions was *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens on the 150th anniversary of the birth of the author and the Diamond Jubilee of the Dickens Fellowship in October 1962. The Southsea Shakespeare Actors gave the Pier a unique honour when they staged *Cymbeline* in October 1966. This production made them the only completely amateur company under an amateur director in the world to present all the plays of Shakespeare. During the Second World War the Pier was closed for a time, and in 1967 its management passed into the hands of Forte's Holdings Ltd. The assurance given to the City Council that amateur companies would still be welcomed did not materialise in practice. Like all the other theatres in the town the Pier engaged many of the outstanding theatrical and musical personalities, and if space allowed many amusing stories could be told about them. One other form of entertainment must be mentioned, the combination of films and variety turns. This was at one time a feature at the Regent before it became the Gaumont, but although it had the deepest stage in the town the manager, James Holland, was never able to obtain a licence for dancing.

In addition to the theatres there were many halls in the town which, although more concerned with

amateur entertainment, did at times house professional shows. These included the Beneficial Society's Hall, the Caledonian Hotel Concert Hall, the Clarence Pier, the Crown Assembly Rooms, Eastney Theatre (not the one in the Marine Barracks), Gaiety Theatre (Commercial Road), Globe Commercial Inn, Green Row Rooms, Jubilee Hall, King's Rooms, Portland Hall, Promenade Rooms, Rendle's Concert Hall (Military Arms Tavern), Royal Pavilion (Grand Parade), the Royalty (Dolphin Hotel), St. George's Hall and the Victoria Hall. St. Peter's Hall was, in a limited way, constructed as a theatre and has served amateur companies for many years but its future now looks somewhat uncertain.

All types of theatres, controlling managements, and players have been dealt with, but so far no mention has been made of the staff concerned with the day-to-day running of the theatres. They are far too often taken for granted and little or no credit is given to them, but they are all part of theatre history and deserve recognition. Portsmouth theatres have been singularly fortunate in their house managers, box office staffs and resident stage-managers, some of them having stayed for more than forty years and one or two for more than fifty. Names of managers who will be remembered include Joe Jeffries, Claude Marner and Charles Johnson; box office personnel are well represented by Eileen Miles, the sisters Nancy and Kathleen Walker and Anne Osborne; others who were well respected by the public included the Miss Goddards, Dorothy Robinson and Edie Brewington. Their personalities all helped to establish good public relationships. One other figure familiar to every theatre-goer for over fifty years was Charles Peters, musical director to Portsmouth Theatres Ltd. Mention should also be made of F. G. Robson, Alex Kinnear and David Evans of the South Parade Pier, all concerned, in addition to their other duties, with the theatre. The stage-managers are not in the public eye, but their work is vital to the success of any theatre. They have to exercise considerable ingenuity and be prepared to work long hours, often through the night. Those familiar with work behind the scenes will recall names such as Horace Sims, Frank Wyatt, Ted Kitchen, Bill Brewington, Frank Lloyd, Arthur Goodfellow and last but not least Bob Coyle, who despite several very tempting offers from leading touring companies remained loyal to Portsmouth Theatres Ltd. for over fifty years, more than half of them as resident stage-manager at the King's. These records of long service are certainly not attributable to the pay but rather to the subtle influence of the theatre, as perhaps the following simple but true story will show. It is based on an *Evening News* report of the last night at the Empire in September 1958. The final curtain had come down, the staff were loath to go and seemed uncertain what to do when suddenly someone started to sing and others took it up. A side door was opened and Mrs. Lilian Salmon who was passing heard the noise, slipped into the theatre and found her way to the stage and on walked Lilian Ravenscroft, 'Lancashire's Singing Mill Girl', who made her *début* on that self-same stage in 1914 as one of the *Six Red-heads* of whom Gracie Fields was also a member. A pianist joined in and soon the theatre was ringing with Lilian's rich contralto voice. Song after song she sang and soon a little crowd gathered round the door including a police-sergeant and two constables. It was long past midnight when someone announced that it was time to go home; Lilian Ravenscroft walked off the stage and Mrs. Lilian Salmon went home much later than she intended but feeling a very happy woman. This incident typifies the spirit of the theatre, and that is why those who once get involved want to stay; that is, if the public give them the chance. If it does not, the reward for all their unselfish service will be 'curtains'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my appreciation of all the facilities granted to me by Mr. Ralph Malbon, City Librarian; and to Mr. Willis-Fear, City Archivist, who produced some interesting items, to Mrs. Margaret Guy, Reference Librarian, for very considerable help, to Mrs. Norman Bartholomew for doing much of the tedious checking of sources, to Miss Sonia Cook and Miss Valerie Bacon for typing, and to many elderly residents who have been able to clear some doubtful points.

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